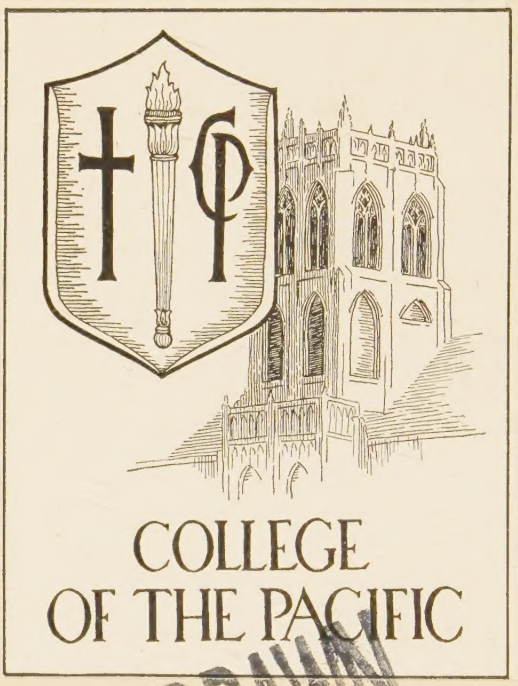
STUDIES IN THE ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

ARTHUR SYMONS



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Studies in the Elizabethan Drama

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BY

ARTHUR SYMONS

AUTHOR OF

"CITIES OF ITALY," "PLAYS, ACTING AND MUSIC,"
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IN PARIS," "THE SYMBOLIST MOVEMENT
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STUDIES IN THE ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

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I. ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

Antony and Cleopatra is the most wonderful, I think, of all Shakespeare's plays, and it is so mainly because the figure of Cleopatra is the most wonderful of Shakespeare's women. And not of Shakespeare's women only, but perhaps the most wonderful of women. The queen who ends the dynasty of the Ptolemies has been the star of poets, a malign star shedding baleful light, from Horace and Propertius down to Victor Hugo; and it is not to poets only that her name has come to be synonymous with all that one can conceive of the subtlety of beauty. Before the thought of Cleopatra every man is an Antony, Shakespeare no less than another, though in the play he holds the balance quite

steadily. The very name calls up everything that one has read or thought or known of "the world well lost," the giving up of all for love, the supreme surrender into the hands of Lilith, and the inevitable penalty. Probably Shakespeare had had his Cleopatra, though, fortunately for us and for him, he stopped short of the choice of Antony, when

> Entre elle et l'univers qui s'offraient à la fois
> Il hésita, lâchant le monde dans son choix.

But unless we adopt the surely untenable theory that the Sonnets, with their passionate sincerity of utterance, the curiously individual note of their complex harmonies, are merely passion according to the Italian Opera, is it not possible that the dark woman, the "woman coloured ill," of whom they show us such significant hints of outline, may have turned his thoughts in the direction of Plutarch's story of Antony and Cleopatra? It is possible; and if so, Shakespeare must have felt a singular satisfaction in putting thus to use an experience bought so sorrowfully, with so much "expense of spirit;" must have felt that he was repaid, more than repaid.

In the conduct of this play, dealing with so typical a story of passion, and with lovers so unrestrained, it is curious to note how much there is of restraint, of coolness, how carefully the style everywhere is heightened, and how much of gravity, in the scenes of political moment, comes to hinder us from any sense of surfeit in those scenes, the central ones of action and interest, in which the heady passion of Cleopatra spends itself. Never was a play fuller of contrasts, of romantic elements, of variety. The stage is turbulent with movement; messengers come and go incessantly, troops are passing over, engaging, and now in flight; the scene shifts, carrying us backward and forward with a surprising rapidity. But one has a feeling that contrast is of the essence of the piece, and that surprise is to be expected; and not even the variety of the play is more evident than its perfect congruity. Some of this comes about, there can be little question, from the way in which Shakespeare has constructed his play on the very lines of Plutarch, following his authority with a scrupulousness not unlike that of a modern Realist for his "human documents," and no doubt for the

same reason. Plutarch was, for Shakespeare, the repository of actual fact; in those pages he found the liveliest image attainable of things as they really happened, and in the comments, outlining the characters, something far more likely to be right than the hazard of any guess of his, so long after. And so fully aware was he of the priceless value of every hint art can extort from nature, of the priceless value of all we can get of real nature, that he was content here to copy merely, to reconstruct after a given plan, and almost without altering a single outline. He gave the outlines life, that was all; and it is a real Antony, a real Cleopatra, that come before us on the romantic stage.

While the main interest of the play is of course centred in the personages who give it name, Shakespeare has not here adopted the device, used in *Macbeth*, for instance, of carefully subordinating all the other characters, leaving the two principal ones under a strong light, and in a salient isolation. He has rather developed these characters through the medium of a crowd of persons and incidents, giving us, not a small corner of existence

burningly alive with tremendous issues, but a lover's tragic comedy played out in the sight of the world, on an eminence, and with the fate of nations depending upon it; a tragic comedy in whose fortunes the arrival of a messenger may make a difference, and whose scenes are timed by interviews with generals and rulers. It is the eternal tragedy of love and ambition, and here, for once, it is the love which holds by the baser nature of the man who is the subject of it, the ambition which is really the prompting of his nobler side. Thus the power of Cleopatra is never more really visible than in the scenes in which she does not appear, and in which Antony seems to have forgotten her. For by the tremendous influences which in these scenes are felt to be drawing him away from her, by all that we see and hear of the incitements to heroic action and manly life, we can measure the force of that magic which brings him back always; from Cæsar, who might be a friend, from Octavia, who would be a wife, from Pompey, a rival; to her feet. Such scenes are, besides, a running comment of moral interpretation, and impress upon us a sane and weighty

criticism of that flushed and feverish existence, with what is certainly so tempting in it, which is being led by these imperial lovers on terms of such absolute abandonment of everything to the claims of love. This criticism is singularly definite, leaving us in no doubt as to the moral Shakespeare intended to draw, a moral still further emphasized by the reticent quietude of Octavia, the counterpoise to Cleopatra; a character of delicate invention, surprising us by the precise and attractive image she leaves upon a play where she is mainly silent. The ambiguous character of Enobarbus is still further useful in giving the point of irony which appears in all really true and fine studies of a world in which irony seems, after all, to be the final word with the disinterested observer. Enobarbus acts the part of chorus. He is neither for nor against virtue; and by seeming to confound moral judgments he serves the part of artistic equity.

" Antonius being thus inclined, the last and extremest mischief of all other (to wit, the love of Cleopatra) lighted upon him, who did waken and stir up many vices yet hidden in him,

and were never seen of any: and if any spark of goodness or hope of rising were left him, Cleopatra quenched it straight, and made it worse than before." So Plutarch, in the picturesque version of Sir Thomas North, "Shakespeare's Plutarch," gives the first distinct sign of the finally downward course of Antony. Of Antony as he had been, we read a little above: "Howbeit he was of such a strong nature, that by patience he would overcome any adversity: and the heavier fortune lay upon him, the more constant showed he himself." When the play opens, this Antony of the past is past indeed; the first words strike the keynote: "Nay, but this dotage of our general's." Yet in the character as it comes before us, one finds, broken indeed yet there though in ruins, the potent nature of the man, standing out now and again suddenly, though with but little result in action. See, for example, in the second scene, the scarcely perceptible flash, in the jesting colloquy with Enobarbus: "No more light words!" and the sudden change which comes about. He can still, when Antony is Antony, command. And observe again, in the meeting

between the jarring triumvirs, how gravely and well he holds his own, and especially that scrupulous care of his honour, evidently so dear to him, and by no means a matter of words only. But the man, as we see him, is wrecked; he has given himself wholly over into the hands of a woman, " being so ravished and enchanted of the sweet poison of her love, that he had no other thought but of her." It is in studying Cleopatra that we shall best see all that is important for us to see of Antony.

In the short scene which serves for prelude to the play, we get a significant glimpse of the kind of power wielded by Cleopatra, and the manner in which she wields it. We see her taming with an inflection of frivolous irony the man who has conquered kingdoms; and we see, too, the unerring and very feminine skill, the finesse of light words veiling a strong purpose, by which she works the charm. From the second scene we perceive something of the tremors incident to a conquest held on such terms: the fear of that " Roman thought " which has taken Antony, the little touch of anxiety at his leaving her for a moment. So long as the man is in her

presence she knows he is safe. But she has always to dread the hour of departure. And now Antony is going. She plays her spells admirably, but with a knowledge that they will be for once in vain. Her tongue still bites with the scourge of Fulvia: "What says the married woman?" the sneer, a little bitter to say, which comes from a consciousness of the something after all worth having in mere virtue, turned desperately into a form of angry and contemptuous mockery. Antony is not yet dead to honour; he feels his strength, feels that he can break away from the enchantress, as Tannhäuser breaks away from Venus. But Cleopatra knows well that, like Tannhäuser, her lover must come back and be hers for ever.

One sees from the scene which follows how deeply Cleopatra loves, not alone her conquest, but her lover. Hers is a real passion, the passion of a woman whose Greek blood is heated by the suns of Egypt, who knows, too, how much greater is the intoxication of loving than of being loved. There is a passage in one of the *Lettres Portugaises*, and no passage in that little golden book is more

subtly true, in which the "learned nun," so learned in the ways of love, pities her inconstant lover for the "infinite pleasures he has lost" if he has never really loved her. "Ah, if you had known them," she says, "vous auriez éprouvé qu'on est beaucoup plus heureux, et qu'on sent quelque chose de bien plus touchant quand on aime violemment que lorsqu'on est aimé." Cleopatra knew this as she knew everything belonging to the art of which she was mistress. "Us who trade in love," she speaks of frankly, but with perfect self-knowledge; a saying, however, which does her injustice if it leads us to confound her with the Manon Lescauts, exquisite, faithless creatures who keep for their lovers an entirely serviceable kind of affection, changing a lover for a calculated advantage. Love is a "trade" in which she never calculates; wily by nature, and as a loving woman is wily who has to humour her lover, she follows her blood, follows it to distraction, and her fits and starts are not alone played for a purpose, before Antony, but are native to her, and break out with the same violence before her women. She is a woman who must have a lover, but

she is satisfied with one, with one at a time; and in Antony she finds her ideal, whom she can call, in her pride, and truly:

> The demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm
> And burgonet of men.

And she loves him with passion real of its kind, an intense, an exacting, an oppressive and overwhelming passion, wholly of the senses and wholly selfish: the love which requires possession, and to absorb the loved one. Before Antony she is never demonstrative: "the way to lose him!" She knows that a man like Antony is not to be taken with snares of mere sweetness, that neither for her beauty nor for her love would he love her continuously. She knows how to interest him, to be to him everything he would have in woman, to change with or before every mood of his as it changes. And this is her secret, as it is the secret of success in her kind of love. "So sweet was her company and conversation that a man could not possibly but be taken," we read in Plutarch. And Shakespeare has expressed it monumentally in the lines which bring the whole woman before us:

> Age cannot wither her nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety: other women cloy
> The appetite they feed; but she makes hungry
> Where most she satisfies: for vilest things
> Become themselves in her.

In the fifth scene of the second act we have what is perhaps the most wonderful revelation that literature gives us of the essentially feminine; not necessarily of woman in the general, but of that which radically, in looking at human nature, seems to differentiate the woman from the man. It is a scene with the infinite variety of Cleopatra: it is as miraculous as she: it proves to us that the woman who was "cunning past man's thought" could not be cunning past the thought of Shakespeare. We realize from this scene, more clearly than from anything else in the play, the boundless empire of her caprice, the incalculable instability of her moods, and how natural to her, how entirely instinctive, is the spirit of change and movement by which, partly, she fascinates her lover. The scene brings out the tiger element in her, the union, which we find so often, of cruelty with voluptuousness. It shows us, too, that even in

the most violent shock of real emotion she never quite loses the consciousness of self, that she cannot be quite simple. Even at the moment when the blow strikes her, the news of the marriage with Octavia, she has still the posing instinct: "I am pale, Charmian!" Then what a world of meaning, how subtle a touch of insight into the secrets of the hearts of women, there is in that avowal:

> In praising Antony, I have dispraised Cæsar.
> . . . . . .
> I am paid for 't now.

But when at last, exhausted by the violence of her battling and uncontrollable emotions, she surprises us by those humble words, so full of real pathos:

> Pity me, Charmian,
> But do not speak to me;

one becomes aware of how deeply the blow has struck, how much there is in her to feel such a blow. Certainly, in this as in everything, she can never be quite simple. There is wounded vanity as well as wounded love in her cry. But it is the proudest as well as the most pitiless of women who asks for pity; and one can refuse her nothing, not even that.

It is significant of the magic charm of the "queen, whom everything becomes," and of the magic of Shakespeare's art, that she fascinates us even in her weakness, dominating derision, and winning an extorted admiration from the very borders of contempt. In the scene which follows the flight from Actium, Shakespeare puts forth his full power. There are few more effective groupings than this of Cleopatra sitting silent over against Antony, neither daring to approach the other; he, crushed into an unspeakable shame which can never be redeemed; she, incapable of shame, but seeing it in the eyes of Antony, and conscious that she has done him a deed which can never be forgiven. She is here, as ever, cunning. Excuses can but be useless, and she attempts none, none but the faintest murmur:

> I never thought
> You would have followed!

It is a mere broken sob of " Pardon, pardon!" The tears are at hand, tears being with her the last weapon of all her armoury. They cannot but conquer, and the lover, who has given the

world for love, says, not without the saddest of irony, as he takes her kiss: "Even this repays me."

It is in the recoil from a reconciliation felt to be ignoble that Antony bursts out into such coarse and furious abuse, the first really angry reproaches he has addressed to her, at the mere sight of Cæsar's messenger kissing her hand. Despair and self-reproach have pricked him into a state of smarting sensitiveness. One sees that, as Enobarbus says, "valour preys on reason"; he is "frighted out of fear." Well may Cæsar exclaim: "Poor Antony!" Is there really a cause for his suspicion of Cleopatra? Did she really betray him to Cæsar? Plutarch is silent, and Shakespeare seems intentionally to leave it a little vague. But I think the suspicion wrongs her. Merely on the ground of worldly prudence she had more to hope from Antony than from Cæsar. And there is nothing in all she says to Antony which comes with a more genuine sound than that reproachful question: "Not know me yet?" and then, "Ah, dear, if I be so!"

I have said that Cleopatra has the instinct

of posing. But in Antony, too, there is almost always something showy, an element of somewhat theatrical sentiment. Now, preparing for his last battle, and really moved himself, he cannot help posturing a little before his servants, exerting himself to win their tears. It is not a simple leave-taking; it comes as if prepared beforehand. And next morning, how stagily, and yet with what a real exhilaration of spirits, does he arm himself and go forth, going forth gallantly, indeed, as Cleopatra says of him! Experience has taught him so little that he thinks even now that he may conquer. It has been so much his habit, as it has been Cleopatra's (caught perhaps from her) to believe what he pleases! His treatment of Enobarbus shows him still capable of a generous act; a little ostentatious, as it may perhaps be. And the effect of that generous and forbearing tolerance shows that his fascination has not left him even in his evil fortune. He can still conquer hearts. And Cleopatra's? His, certainly, is still hers; and when, raging against the woman who has wrought all his miseries, he learns the news of her pretended death, it is with words full of the quiet of

despair that he takes the blow which releases him:

> Unarm me, Eros; the long day's task is done,
> And we must sleep.

Love, as it does always when death has freed us from what we had felt to be a burden, returns; and he stabs himself with the sole thought of rejoining her. When, this side of the grave, he does rejoin her, not a syllable of regret or reproach falls from his lips. In the presence of death he becomes gentle: the true sweetness of the man's nature, long poisoned, comes back again at last. Nothing now is left him but his love for Cleopatra, love refined to an oblivious tenderness; that, and the thought that death is upon him, and that he falls not ignobly:

> a Roman by a Roman
> Valiantly vanquished.

And so the fourth act ends on the magnificent words of Cleopatra over the dead body of the lord of the world and of her. The thought and the spectacle of death, of such a death, call out in her a far-thoughted reflection on the blindness of Fate, the general hazard of the world's course, with a vivid sense of the

emptiness of all for which one takes thought. Death takes Antony as a mean man is taken; her, too, he leaves unqueened, a mere woman who has lost her lover. Then "all's but nought," the world is left poor, the light of it gone out; and it is with real sincerity, with a feeling of overwhelming disaster now irretrievably upon her, that she looks to "the briefest end."

In her last days Cleopatra touches a certain elevation: the thought of the death she prepares for herself intoxicates (while it still frights) her reason. It gives her still a triumphant sense of her mastery over even Cæsar, whom she will conquer by eluding; over even Destiny, from which she will escape by the way of death. After all, the keenest incitement to her choice comes from the thought of being led in triumph to Rome; of appearing there, little and conquered, before Octavia. She has lived a queen; in all her fortunes there has been, as she conceived it, no dishonour. She will die now, she would die a thousand times, rather than live to be a mockery and a scorn in men's mouths. How significant is her ceaseless and panging remembrance of

Octavia! a touch of almost petty spite, the spite of a jealous woman. Petty, too (but, inexhaustible as she is in resources, turned, with the frank audacity of genius, into a final triumph) is the keeping back of the treasures. But craft is as natural to her as breath. It is by craft that she is to attain her end of dying. The means of that attainment, a poor man bringing death in his basket of figs, the very homeliness of the fact, comes with an added effect of irony in the passing of this imperial creature. She is a woman to the last, and it is in no heroic frame of mind that she commends the easiness of the death by which she is to die. Yet, too, all her greatness gathers itself, her love of Antony (the one thing that had ever been real and steadfast in the deadly quicksand of her mind) her pride and her tenderness, and, at the last, her resolution.

> I am fire and air; my other elements
> I give to baser life.

So she dies, undisfigured in death, the signs of death barely perceptible, lying

> As she would catch another Antony
> In her strong toil of grace.

And the play ends with a touch of grave pity over "a pair so famous," cut off after a life so full of glory and of dishonour, and taking with them, in their passing out of it, so much of the warmth and colour of the world.

1889.

II. MACBETH

Of all Shakespeare's tragedies, *Macbeth* is the simplest in outline, the swiftest in action. After the witches' prelude, the first scene brings us at once into the centre of stormy interest, and in Macbeth's first words an ambiguous note prepares us for strange things to come. Thence to the end there is no turning aside in the increasing speed of events. Thought jumps to action, action is overtaken by consequence, with a precipitate haste, as if it were all written breathlessly. And in the style (always the style of Shakespeare's maturity) there is a hurry, and impatient condensation, metaphor running into metaphor, thought on the heels of thought, which gives (apart from the undoubted corruption of the text as it comes to us) something abrupt, difficult, violent, to the language of even unimportant characters, messengers or soldiers. Thus, the play has several of those memorable condensations of a great matter into a little compass, of

which Macduff's "He has no children!" is perhaps the most famous in literature; together with less than usual of mere comment on life. If here and there a philosophical thought meets us, it is the outcry of sensation (as in the magnificent words which sum up the vanity of life in the remembrance of the dusty ending) rather than a reflection, in any true sense of the word. Of pathos, even, there is, on the whole, not much. In that scene from which I have just quoted the crowning words, there is, I think, a note of pathos beyond which language cannot go; and in the scene which leads up to it, a scene full of the most delicate humour, the humour born of the unconscious nearness of things pitiful, there is something truly pathetic, a pathos which clings about all Shakespeare's portraits of children. But elsewhere, even in places where we might expect it, there is but little sign of a quality with which it was not in Shakespeare's plan to lighten the terror or soften the hardness of the impression one receives from this sombre play. Terror: that was the effect at which he seems to have aimed; terror standing out vividly against a back-

ground of obscure and yet more dreadful mystery. The "root of horror," from which the whole thing grows, has been planted, one becomes aware, in hell: do the supernatural solicitings merely foreshow, or do they really instigate, the deeds to which they bear witness? Omens blacken every page. An "Old Man" is brought into the play for no other purpose than to become the appropriate mouthpiece of the popular sense of the strange disturbance in the order of nature. Macbeth is the prey to superstition, and it seems really as if a hand other than his own forces him forward on the road to destruction. In no other play of Shakespeare's, not even in *Hamlet*, is the power of spiritual agencies so present with us; nowhere is Fate so visibly the handmaid or the mistress of Retribution. In such a play it is no wonder that pathos is swallowed up in terror, and that the only really frank abandonment to humour is in an interlude of ghastly pleasantry, the Shakespearean authorship of which has been doubted.

In this brief and rapid play, where the action has so little that is superfluous, and all is ordered with so rigid a concentration, the in-

terest is still further narrowed and intensified by being directed almost wholly upon two persons. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth fill the stage. In painting them Shakespeare has expended his full power. He has cared to do no more than sketch the other characters. As in one of Michelangelo's sketches, the few lines of the drawing call up a face as truly lifelike as that which fronts us in the completed picture. But in the play these subordinate figures are forgotten in the absorbing interest of the two primary ones. The real conflict, out of which the action grows, is the conflict between the worse and better natures of these two persons; the real tragedy is one of conscience, and the murder of Duncan, the assassination of Banquo, the slaughters with which the play is studded, are but the outward signs, the bloody signatures, of the terrible drama which is going on within.

When Macbeth, returning victorious from the field of battle, is met by the witches' prediction: "All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter!" is it not curious that his thoughts should turn with such astonishing promptitude to the idea of murder? The tinder, it is evi-

dent, is lying ready, and it needs but a spark to set the whole fire aflame. We learn from his wife's analysis of his character that he is ambitious, discontented, willing to do wrong in order to attain to greatness, yet, like so many of the unsuccessful criminals, hampered always in the way of wrong-doing by an inconvenient afterthought of virtue. He has never enough of it to stay his hand from the deed, but he has just sufficient to sicken him of the crime when only half-way through it. He may plan and plot, but at the last he acts always on impulse, and is never able to pursue a deliberate course coolly. He knows himself well enough to say, once:

> No boasting like a fool:
> This deed I'll do before the purpose cool.

Before the purpose cool! that is always the danger to fear, in a nature of this unstable sort. He can murder Duncan, but he cannot bring himself to return and face his work, though his own safety depends upon it. It is the woman who goes back into the fatal chamber, to which he dares not return. No sooner has he done the deed than he wishes it undone. His con-

science is awake now, awake and maundering. With the dawn courage returns; he is able to play his part with calmness, a new impulse having taken the place of the last one. Remorse, for the present, is put aside. He plots Banquo's death deliberately, and is almost gay in hinting it to his wife. Now, his feeling seems to be, we shall be safe: no need for more crime! And then, perhaps, there will be no more of the "terrible dreams."

When Banquo's ghost appears, Macbeth's acting breaks down. He is in the hold of a fresh sensation, and horror and astonishment overwhelm all. After having thought himself at last secure! It is always through the superstitious side of his nature that Macbeth is impressible. His agitation at the sight of the ghost of Banquo is not, I think, a trick of the imagination, but the horror of a man who sees the actual ghost of the man he has slain. Thus he cannot reason it away, as, before the fancied dagger (a heated brain conjuring up images of its own intents) he can exclaim: "There's no such thing!" The horror fastens deeply upon him, and he goes sullenly onward in the path of blood, seeing now that there is no re-

turning by a way so thronged with worse than memories.

Since his initiate step in this path, Macbeth has never been free from the mockery of desire to overcome his fears, to be at peace in evil-doing, to "sleep in spite of thunder." But his mind becomes more and more divided against itself, and the degradation of his nature goes on apace. When we see him finally at bay in his fortress, he is broken down by agitation, and the disturbance of all within and without, into a state of savage distraction, in which the individual sense of guilt seems to be lost in a sullen growth of moody distrust and of somewhat aimless ferocity. He is in that state in which "the grasshopper is a burden," and every event presents itself as an unbearable irritation. His nerves are unstrung; he bursts out into precipitate and causeless anger at the mere sight of the messenger who enters to him. One sees his mental and bodily collapse in the impossibility of controlling the least whim. He calls for his armour, has it put on, pulls it off, bids it be brought after him. He talks to the doctor about the affairs of war, and plays grimly on

medical terms. He dares now to confess to himself how weary he is of everything beneath the sun, and seeks in vain for what may "minister to a mind diseased." When, on a cry of women from within, he learns that his wife is dead, he can speak no word of regret. "She should have died hereafter;" that is all, and a moralization. He has "supped full with horrors," and the taste of them has begun to pall. There remains now only the release of death. As prophecy after prophecy comes to its fulfilment, and the last hope is lost, desperation takes the place of confidence. When finally, he sees the man before him by whom he knows that he is to die, his soldier's courage rises at a taunt, and he fights to the end.

> Nothing in his life
> Became him like the leaving it.

The " note," as it may be called, of Macbeth is the weakness of a bold mind, a vigorous body; that of Lady Macbeth is the strength of a finely-strung but perfectly determined nature. She dominates her husband by the persistence of an irresistible will; she herself, her woman's weakness, is alike dominated

by the same compelling force. Let the effect on her of the witches' prediction be contrasted with the effect on Macbeth. In Macbeth there is a mental conflict, an attempt, however feeble, to make a stand against the temptation. But the prayer of his wife is not for power to resist, but for power to carry out, the deed. The same ambitions that were slumbering in him are in her stirred by the same spark into life. The flame runs through her and possesses her in an instant, and from the thought to its realization is but a step. Like all women, she is practical, swift from starting-point to goal, imperious in disregard of hindrances that may lie in the way. But she is resolute, also, with a determination which knows no limits; imaginative, too (imagination being to her in the place of virtue) and it is this she fears, and it is this that wrecks her. Her prayer to the spirits that tend on mortal thoughts shows by no means a mind steeled to compunction. Why should she cry:

> Stop up the access and passage to remorse!

if hers were a mind in which no visitings of pity had to be dreaded? Her language is fervid,

sensitive, and betrays with her first words the imagination which is her capacity for suffering. She is a woman who can be "magnificent in sin," but who has none of the callousness which makes the comfort of the criminal; not one of the poisonous women of the Renaissance, who smiled complacently after an assassination, but a woman of the North, in whom sin is its own "first revenge." She can do the deed, and she can do it triumphantly; she can even think her prayer has been answered; but the horror of the thing will change her soul, and at night, when the will, that supported her indomitable mind by day, slumbers with the overtaxed body, her imagination (the soul she has in her for her torture) will awake and cry at last aloud. On the night of the murder it is Macbeth who falters; it is he who wishes that the deed might be undone, she who says to him

> These deeds must not be thought
> After these ways; so, it will make us mad;

but to Macbeth (despite the "terrible dreams") time dulls the remembrance from its first intensity; he has not the fineness of nature

that gives the power of suffering to his wife. Guilt changes both, but him it degrades. Hers is not a nature that can live in degradation. To her no degradation is possible. Her sin was deliberate; she marched straight to her end; and the means were mortal, not alone to the man who died, but to her. Macbeth could as little comprehend the depth of her suffering as she his hesitancy in a determined action. It is this fineness of nature, this over-possession by imagination, which renders her interesting, elevating her punishment into a sphere beyond the comprehension of a vulgar criminal.

In that terrible second scene of Act II, perhaps the most awe-inspiring scene that Shakespeare ever wrote, the splendid qualities of Lady Macbeth are seen in their clearest light. She has taken wine to make her bold, but there is an exaltation in her brain beyond anything that wine could give. Her calmness is indeed unnatural, over-strained, by no means so composed as she would have her husband think. But having determined on her purpose, there is with her no returning, no thought of return. It is with a burst of real anger, of

angry contempt, that she cries "Give *me* the daggers!" and her exaltation upholds her as she goes back and faces the dead man and the sleeping witnesses. She can even, as she returns, hear calmly the knocking that speaks so audibly to the heart of Macbeth, taking measures for their safety if anyone should enter. She can even look resolutely at her bloody hands, and I imagine she half believes her own cynical words when she says:

> A little water clears us of this deed:
> How easy is it then!

Her will, her high nature (perverted, but not subdued) her steeled sensitiveness, the intoxication of crime and of wine, sustain her in a forced calmness which she herself little suspects will ever fail her. How soon it does fail, or rather how soon the body takes revenge upon the soul, is seen next morning, when, after overacting her part in the famous words, "What, in our house?" she falls in a swoon, by no means counterfeit, we may be sure, though Macbeth, by his disregard of it, seems to think so. After this, we see her but rarely. A touch of the deepest melancholy

("Nought's had, all's spent!") marks the few words spoken to herself as she waits for Macbeth on the night which is, though unknown to her, to be fatal to Banquo. No sooner has Macbeth entered than she greets him in the old resolute spirit; and again on the night of the banquet she is, as ever, full of bitter scorn and contempt for the betraying weakness of her husband, prompt to cover his confusion with a plausible tale to the guests. She is still mistress of herself, and only the weariness of the few words she utters after the guests are gone, only the absence of the reproaches we are expecting, betray the change that is coming over her. One sees a trace of lassitude, that is all.

From this point Lady Macbeth drops out of the play, until, in the fifth act, we see her for the last time. Even now it is the body rather than the soul that has given way. What haunts her is the smell and sight of the blood, the physical disgust of the thing. "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." One hears the self-pitying note with which she says the words. Even now, even when unconscious, her scorn still bites at the

feebleness of her husband. The will, in this shattered body, is yet unbroken. There is no repentance, no regret, only the intolerable vividness of accusing memory; the sight, the smell, ever present to her eyes and nostrils. It has been thought that the words "Hell is murky!" the only sign, if sign it be, of fear at the thought of the life to come, are probably spoken in mocking echo of her husband. Even if not, they are a passing shudder. It is enough for her that her hands still keep the sensation of the blood upon them. The imagination which stands to her in the place of virtue has brought in its revenge, and for her too there is left only the release of death. She dies, not of remorse at her guilt, but because she has miscalculated her power of resistance to the scourge of an over-acute imagination.

1889.

III. TWELFTH NIGHT

The play of *Twelfth Night*, coming midway in the career of Shakespeare, perhaps just between *As You Like It*, the Arcadian comedy, and *All's Well That Ends Well*, a comedy in name, but kept throughout on the very edge of tragedy, draws up into itself the separate threads of wit and humour from the various plays which had preceded it, weaving them all into a single texture. It is in some sort a farewell to mirth, and the mirth is of the finest quality, an incomparable ending. Shakespeare has done greater things, but nothing more delightful. One might fancy that the play had been composed in a time of special comfort and security, when soul and body were in perfect equipoise, and the dice of circumstance had fallen happily. A golden mean, a sweet moderation, reigns throughout. Here and there, in the more serious parts of the dialogue, we have one of Shakespeare's most beautiful touches, as in the divine opening lines, in

Viola's story of the sister who "never told her love," and in much of that scene; but in general the fancy is moderated to accord with the mirth, and refrains from sounding a very deep or a very high note. Every element of the play has the subtlest links with its fellow. Tenderness melts into a smile, and the smile broadens imperceptibly into laughter. Without ever absolutely mingling, the two streams of the plot flow side by side, following the same windings, and connected by tributary currents. Was there ever a more transparently self-contradictory theory than that which removes one or two minute textual difficulties by the tremendous impossibility of a double date? No characteristic of the play is more unmistakable than its perfect unity and sure swiftness of composition, the absolute rondure of the O of Giotto, done at a single sweep of the practised arm. It is such a triumph of construction that it is hard, in reading it, to get rid of the feeling that it has been written at one sitting.

The protagonist of the play, the center of our amused interest, is certainly Malvolio, but it is on the fortunes of Viola, in her rela-

tions with the Duke and Olivia, that the action really depends. The Duke, the first speaker on the stage, is an egoist, a gentle and refined specimen of the class which has been summed up finally in the monumental character of Sir Willoughby Patterne. He is painted without satire, with the gentle forbearance of the profound and indifferent literary artist; shown, indeed, almost exclusively on his best side, yet, though sadly used as a lover, he awakens no pity, calls up no champion in our hearts. There is nothing base in his nature; he is incapable of any meanness, never harsh or unjust, gracefully prone to the virtues which do not take root in self-denial, to facile kindness, generosity, sympathy; he can inspire a tender love; he can love, though but with a desire of the secondary emotions; but he is self-contemplative, in another sense from Malvolio, one of those who play delicately upon life, whose very sorrows have an elegant melancholy, the sting of a sharp sauce which refreshes the palate cloyed by an insipid dish: a sentimental egoist. See, for a revealing touch of Shakespeare's judgment on him, his shallow words on woman's incapacity for

love, so contradictory to what he has said the moment before, an inconsistency so exquisitely characteristic; both said with the same lack of vital sincerity, the same experimental and argumentative touch upon life. See how once only, in the fifth act, he blows out a little frothy bluster, a show of manliness, harsh words but used as goblin tales to frighten children; words whose vacillation in the very act comes out in the "What shall I do?", in the pompous declaration, "My thoughts are ripe in mischief", in the side-touches, like an admiring glance aside in the glass at his own most effective attitude, "a savage jealousy that sometime savours nobly," and the like. When he coolly gives up the finally-lost Olivia, and turns to the love and sympathy he knows are to be found in Viola (as, in after days, Sir Willoughby will turn to his Lætitia) the shallowness of his nature reveals itself in broad daylight.

Olivia is the complement to Orsino, a tragic sentimentalist, with emotions which it pleases her to play on a little consciously, yet capable of feeling, of a pitch beyond the Duke's too loudly-speaking passion. Her cloistral mourn-

ing for her brother's death has in it something theatrical, not quite honest, a playing with the emotions. She makes a luxury of her grief, and no doubt it loses its sting. Then, when a new face excites her fancy, the artificial condition into which she has brought herself leaves her an easy prey, by the natural rebound, to a possessing imagination. She becomes violently enamoured, yet honestly enough, of the disguised Viola, and her passion survives the inevitable substitution. Shakespeare has cleansed her from the stains of the old story, as he cleansed the heroine of *Measure for Measure*: the note of wantonness is never struck. She is too like the Duke ever to care for him. She has and she fills her place in the play, but the place is a secondary one, and she is without power over our hearts.

We turn to Viola with relief. She is a true woman, exquisitely gracious in that silent attendance upon a love seeming to have been chosen in vain; yet we can find for her no place in the incomparable company of Shakespeare's very noblest women. She has a touch of the sentimental, and will make a good wife for the Duke; she is without the strength of

temperament or dignity of intellect which would scorn a delicately sentimental egoist. She is incapable of the heroism of Helena, of Isabella; she is of softer nature, of slighter build and lowlier spirit than they, while she has none of the overbrimming life, the intense and dazzling vitality, of Rosalind. Her male disguise is almost unapparent; she is covered by it as by a veil; it neither spurs her lips to sauciness, as with Rosalind, nor tames her into infinite dainty fears, as with Imogen; she is here, as she would be always, quiet, secure, retiring yet scarcely timid, with a pleasant playfulness breaking out now and then, the effect, not of high spirits, but of a whimsical sense of her secret when she feels safe in it, coming among women. Without any of the more heroic lineaments of her sex, she has the delicacy and tender truth that we all find so charming: an egoist supremely, when the qualities are his for possessing. She represents the typical female heart offering itself to the man: an ingenuous spectacle, with the dew upon it of early morning. She is permitted to speak the tenderest words in which pathos crowns and suffuses love; and

once, under the spell of music, her small voice of low and tender changes rings out with immortal clearness, and for the moment, like the words she says,

> It gives a very echo to the seat
> Where love is throned.

Of Malvolio all has been said, and but little shall be said of him here. He is a Don Quixote in the colossal enlargement of his delusions, in the cruel irony of Fate, which twists topsy-turvy, making a mere straw in the wind of him, an eminently sober and serious man of the clearest uprightness, unvisited by a stray glimpse of saving humour. He is a man of self-sufficiency, a noble quality perilously near to self-complacency, and he has passed the bounds without knowing it. His unbending solemnity is his ruin. Nothing presents so fair a butt for the attack of a guerilla-fighting wit. It is indeed the most generally obnoxious of all tolerable qualities; for it is a living rebuke of our petty levities, and it hints to us of a conscious superior. Even a soldier is not required to be always on drill. A lofty moralist, a starched formalist, like

Malvolio, is salt and wormwood in the cakes and ale of gourmand humanity. It is with the nicest art that he is kept from rising sheer out of comedy into a tragic isolation of attitude. He is restrained, and we have no heartache in the laughter that seconds the most sprightly of clowns, the sharpest of serving-maids, and the incomparable pair of roysterers, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew.

Shakespeare, like Nature, has a tenderness for man in his cups, and will not let him come to grief. Sir Toby's wit bubbles up from no fountain of wisdom; it is shallow, radically bibulous, a brain-fume blown from a mere ferment of wits. His effect is truly and purely comic; but it is rather from the way in which the playwright points and places him than from his own comic genius; in this how unlike Falstaff, who appears to owe nothing to circumstances, but to escape from and dominate his creator. Sir Toby is the immortal type of the average "funny fellow" and boon-companion of the clubs or the alehouse; you may meet him any day in the street, with his portly build, red plump cheeks, and merry eyes twinkling at the incessant joke of life.

His mirth is facile, contagious, continual; it would become wearisome perhaps at too long a dose, but through a single comic scene it is tickling, pervasive, delightful. Sir Andrew is the grindstone on which Sir Toby sharpens his wit. He is an instance of a natural fool becoming truly comic by the subtle handling in which he is not allowed to awaken too keenly either pity or contempt. In life he would awaken both. He is a harmless simpleton, an innocent and unobtrusive bore, "a Slender grown adult in brainlessness;" and he is shown in all his fatuity without a note or touch of really ill-natured sarcasm. Shakespeare's humour plays round him, enveloping him softly; his self-esteem has no shock; unlike Malvolio, he is permitted to remain undeceived to the end. It is to his credit that he is not without glimmerings that he is a fool. The kindness, is, that the conviction is not forced upon him from without.

1889.

IV. MEASURE FOR MEASURE

Measure for Measure is neither the last of the comedies nor the first of the tragedies. It is tragedy and comedy together, inextricably interfused, coexistent in a mutual contradiction; such a tangled web, indeed, as our life is, looked at by the actors in it, on the level of its action; with certain suggestions, open or concealed, of the higher view, the aspect of things from the point of view of a tolerant wisdom. The hidden activity of the Duke, working for ends of beneficent justice, in the midst of the ferment and corruption of the seething city; this figure of personified Providence, watchfully cognizant of act and motive, has been conceived by Shakespeare (not yet come to his darkest mood, in which man is a mere straw in the wind of Destiny) to give a sense of security, centred within even such a maze as this. It is not from Isabella that we get any such sense. Her very courage and purity and intellectual light

do but serve to deepen the darkness, when we conceive of her as but one sacrifice the more. Just as Cordelia intensifies the pity and terror of *King Lear*, so would Isabella's helpless virtues add the keenest ingredient to the cup of bitterness, but for the Duke. He is a foretaste of Prospero, a Prospero working greater miracles without magic; and he guides us through the labyrinths of the play by a clue of which he has the secret.

That *Measure for Measure* is a "painful" play (as Coleridge called it) cannot be denied. There is something base and sordid in the villany of its actors; a villany which has nothing of the heroism of sin. In Angelo we have the sharpest lesson that Shakespeare ever read self-righteousness. In Claudio we see a "gilded youth" with the gilding rubbed off. From Claudio's refined wantonness we sink deeper and deeper, through Lucio, who is a Claudio by trade, and without even the pretence of gilding, to the very lowest depth of a city's foulness and brutality. The "humours" of bawd and hangman and the customers of both are painted with as angry a hand as Hogarth's; bitten in with the etcher's

acid, as if into the very flesh. Even Elbow, "a simple constable," a Dogberry of the lower dregs, struts and maunders before us with a desperate imbecility, in place of the engaging silliness, where silliness seemed a hearty comic virtue, of the "simple constable" of the earlier play. In the astonishing portrait of Barnardine we come to the simply animal man; a portrait which in its savage realism, brutal truth to nature, cynical insight into the workings of the contended beast in man, seems to anticipate some of the achievements of the modern Realistic novel. In the midst of this crowd of evil-doers walks the Duke, hooded body and soul in his friar's habit; Escalus, a solitary figure of broad and sturdy uprightness; Isabella, "a thing enskied and sainted," the largest-hearted and clearest-eyed heroine of Shakespeare; and apart, veiled from good and evil in a perpetual loneliness of sorrow, Mariana, in the moated grange.

In the construction of this play Shakespeare seems to have put forth but a part of his strength, throwing his full power only into the great scenes, and leaving, with less than his customary care (in strong contrast to what we

note in *Twelfth Night*) frayed ends and edges of action and of characterization. The conclusion, particularly, seems hurried, and the disposal of Angelo inadequate. I cannot but think that Shakespeare felt the difficulty, the impossibility, of reconciling the end which his story and the dramatic conventionalities required with the character of Angelo as shown in the course of the play, and that he slurred over the matter as best he could. With space before him he might have convinced us, being Shakespeare, of the sincerity of Angelo's repentance and the rightfulness of his remission; but as it is, crowded as all this conviction and penitence and forgiveness necessarily is into a few minutes of supplementary action one can hardly think that Coleridge expressed the natural feeling too forcibly in declaring "the strong indignant claim of justice" to be baffled by the pardon and marriage of Angelo. Of the scenes in which Angelo appears as the prominent actor (the incomparable second and fourth scenes of the second act, the first the temptation of Angelo, the second Angelo's temptation of Isabella) nothing can be said but that Shakespeare may have

equalled, but has scarcely exceeded them, in intensity and depth of natural truth. These, with that other scene between Claudio and Isabella, make the play.

It is part of the irony of things that the worst complication, the deepest tragedy in all this tortuous action, comes about by the innocent means of the stainless Isabella; who also, by her steadfast heroism, brings about the final peace. But for Isabella, Claudio would simply have died, perhaps meeting his fate, when it came, with a desperate flash of his father's courage; Angelo might have lived securely to his last hour, unconscious of his own weakness, of the fire that lurked in so impenetrable a flint. Shakespeare has sometimes been praised for the subtlety with which he has barbed the hook for Angelo, in making Isabella's very chastity the keenest of temptations. The notion is not peculiar to Shakespeare, but was hinted at, in his scrambling and uncertain way, by the writer of the old play on which *Measure for Measure* is founded. In truth, I do not see what other course was open to either in dealing with a situation which was not original in Shakespeare or in Whet-

stone. Angelo, let us remember, is not a hypocrite: he has no dishonourable intention in his mind; he conceives himself to be firmly grounded on a broad basis of rectitude, and in condemning Claudio he condemns a sin which he sincerely abhors. His treatment of the betrothed Mariana would probably be in his own eyes an act of frigid justice; it certainly shows a man not sensually-minded, but cold, calculating, likely to err, if he errs at all, rather on the side of the miserly virtues than of the generous sins. It is thus the nobility of Isabella that attracts him; her freedom from the tenderest signs of frailty, her unbiassed intellect, her regard for justice, her religious sanctity; and it is on his noblest side first, the side of him that can respond to these qualities, that he is tempted. I know of nothing more consummate than the way in which his mind is led on, step by step, towards the trap still hidden from him, the trap prepared by the merciless foresight of the chance that tries the professions and the thoughts of men. Once tainted, the corruption is over him like leprosy, and every virtue withers into the corresponding form of vice.

In Claudio it is the same touchstone, Isabella's unconscious and misdirected Ithuriel-spear, that reveals the basest forms of evil. A great living painter has chosen the central moment of the play, the moment when Claudio, having heard the terms on which alone life can be purchased, murmurs, "Death is a fearful thing," and Isabella, not yet certain, yet already with the fear astir in her of her brother's weakness replies, "And shamed life a hateful;" it is this moment which Holman Hunt brings before us in a canvas that, like his scene from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, is not only a picture but an interpretation. Against the stained and discoloured wall of his dungeon, apple-blossoms and blue sky showing through the grated window behind his delicate dishevelled head, Claudio stands; a lute tied with red ribbons hangs beside him, a rose has fallen on the dark garments at his feet, one hand plays with his fetters (with how significant a gesture!) the other hand pinches, idly affectionate, the two intense hands that Isabella has laid upon his breast; he is thinking, where to debate means shame, balancing the arguments; and with pondering eyes,

thrusting his tongue towards the corner of his just-parted lips with a movement of exquisite naturalness, he halts in indecision: all his mean thoughts are there, in that gesture, in those eyes; and in the warm and gracious youth of his whole aspect, passionately superficial and in love with life, there is something of the pathos of things "sweet, not lasting," a fragile, an unreasonable, an inevitable pathos. Isabella fronts him, an embodied conscience, all her soul in her eyes. Her eyes read him, plead with him, they are suppliant and judge; her intense fearfulness, the intolerable doubt of her brother's honour, the anguish of hope and fear, shine in them with a light as of tears frozen at the source. In a moment, with words on his lips whose far-reaching imagination is stung into him and from him by the sharpness of the impending death, he will have stooped below the reach of her contempt, uttering those words. "Sweet sister, let me live!"

After all, the final word of Shakespeare in this play is mercy; but it is a mercy which comes of the consciousness of our own need of it, and it is granted and accepted in humilia-

tion. The lesson of mercy taught in *The Merchant of Venice* is based on the mutual blessing of its exercise, the graciousness of the spirit to which it is sign and seal.

> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath; it is twice blest;
> It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

Here, the claim which our fellow-man has on our commiseration is the sad claim of mutual guiltiness before an absolute bar of justice.

> How would you be
> If He, which is the top of judgment, should
> But judge you as you are?

And is not the "painfulness," which impresses us in this sombre play, due partly to this very moral, and not alone to the circumstances from which it disengages itself? For it is so "painful" to think that we are no better than our neighbours.

1890.

V. THE WINTER'S TALE

The Winter's Tale is a typically romantic drama, a "winter's dream, when nights are longest," constructed in defiance of probabilities, which it rides over happily. It has all the licence, and all the charm, of a fairy tale, while the matters of which it treats are often serious enough, ready to become tragic at any moment, and with much of real tragedy in them as it is. The merciful spirit of Shakespeare in his last period, grown to repose now after the sharp sunshine and storm of his earlier and middle years, the delicate art which that period matured in him, seen at its point of finest delicacy in this play and in *The Tempest*, alone serve to restrain what would otherwise be really painful in the griefs and mistaken passions of the perturbed persons of the drama. Something, the very atmosphere, the dawning of light among the clouds at their blackest, at first a hint, then

distinctly a promise, of things coming right at last, keeps us from taking all these distresses, genuine as they are, too seriously. It is all human life, but life under happier skies, on continents where the shores of Bohemia are washed by "faery seas." Anachronisms abound, and are delightful. That Delphos should be an island, Giulio Romano contemporary with the Oracles, that Puritans should sing psalms to hornpipes, and a sudden remembrance call up the name of Jove or Proserpina to the forgetful lips of Christian-speaking characters: all this is of no more importance than a trifling error in the count of miles traversed by a witch's broomstick in a minute. Too probable figures would destroy the illusion, and the error is a separate felicity.

It is quite in keeping with the other romantic characteristics of the play, that, judged by the usual standard of such a Romantic as Shakespeare himself, it should be constructed with exceptional looseness, falling into two very definite halves, the latter of which can again, in a measure, be divided. The first part, which takes place in Sicilia, is a study of

jealousy; the whole interest is concentrated upon the relations of the "usual three, husband and wife and friend:" Leontes, Hermione, and Polixenes. The jealousy is in possession when we first see Leontes; it bursts forth, flames to its height, almost at once; in its furious heat runs through its whole course with the devouring speed of a race-horse; and then has its downfall, sudden and precipitate, and so dies of its own over-swiftness. Act III, Scene 2, ends the first part of the play; and with the third scene begins the second part, taking us from Sicilia, where the widowed and childless king is left mourning, to Bohemia, where the children, not long born when we last saw Sicilia, are now come to years of love. Then, all through the fourth act, we are with Florizel and Perdita; a sweet pastoral, varied with the dainty knaveries of a rogue as light-hearted as he is light-fingered; the pastoral, too, coming to a sudden and disastrous end, not without a doubtful gleam of hope for the future. With Act V we return to Sicilia, having from the beginning a sense that things are now at last coming to a desired end. Leontes' proved faithfulness, his sixteen years'

burden of "saint-like sorrow" gives him the right, one feels, to the happiness that is so evidently drawing near. All does, indeed, fall well, as the whole company comes together at the court of Sicilia, now re-united at last, husband with his lost wife (another Alcestis from the grave) father and mother with child, lover with lover (the course of true love smooth again) friend with friend, the faithful servants rewarded with each other, the worthless likable knave, even, in a good way of getting on in the world.

The principal charm in *The Winter's Tale*, its real power over the sources of delight, lies in the two women, true mother and daughter, whose fortunes we see at certain moments, the really important crises of their lives. Hermione, as we have just time to see her before the blow comes, is happy wife and happy mother, fixed, as it seems, in a settled happiness. Grave, not gay, but with a certain quiet playfulness, such as so well becomes stately women, she impresses us with a feeling, partly of admiration, partly of attraction. It is with a sort of devoted reverence that we see her presently, patient, yet not abject, under the

dishonouring accusations of the fool her husband. "Good my lords," she can say,

> I am not prone to weeping, as our sex
> Commonly are; the want of which vain dew
> Perchance shall dry your pities; but I have
> That honourable grief lodged here which burns
> Worse than tears drown. 'Beseech you all, my lords
> With thoughts so qualified as your charities
> Shall best instruct you, measure me: and so
> The king's will be performed.

All Hermione is in those words, no less than in the calm forthrightness of her defence, spoken afterwards in the Court of Justice. She has no self-consciousness, is not aware that at any time in her life she is heroic; "a very woman," merely simple, sincere, having in reverence the sanctity of wifehood and in respect the dignity of queenship. In Perdita, the daughter so long lost and in the end so happily restored to her, we see, in all the gaiety of youth, the frank innocence and the placid strength of Hermione. She is the incarnation of all that is delightful and desirable in girlhood, as her mother incarnates for us the perfect charm of mature woman. And, coming before us where she does, a shepherdess among pastoral people, "the queen of

curds and cream," she seems to sum up and immortalize, in one delicious figure, our holiday loves, our most vivid sensations of country pleasures. It is the grace of Florizel that he loves Perdita; he becomes charming to us because Perdita loves him. In these young creatures the old passion becomes new; and for an hour we too are as if we had never loved, but are now in the first moment of the unique discovery.

This charm of womanhood, this purely delightful quality, of which the play has so much, though it remains, I think, our chief memory after reading or seeing the course of action, is not, we must remember, the only quality, the whole course of the action. Besides the ripe comedy, characteristic of Shakespeare at his latest, which indeed harmonizes admirably with the idyl of love to which it serves as background, there is also a harsh exhibition, in Leontes, of the meanest of the passions, an insane jealousy, petty and violent as the man who nurses it. For sheer realism, for absolute insight into the most cobwebbed corners of our nature, Shakespeare has rarely surpassed this brief study,

which, in its total effect, does but throw out in brighter relief the noble qualities of the other actors beside him, the pleasant qualities of the play they make by their acting. With Othello there is properly no comparison. Othello could no more comprehend the workings of the mind of Leontes than Leontes could fathom the meaning of the attitude of Othello. Leontes is meanly, miserably, degradedly jealous, with a sort of mental alienation or distortion, a disease of the brain like some disease of vision, by which he still "sees yellow" everywhere. The malady has its course, disastrously, and then ends in the only way possible: by an agonizing cure, suddenly applied. Are those sixteen years of mourning we may wonder, really adequate penance for the man? Certainly his suffering, like his criminal folly, was great; and not least among the separate heartaches in that purifying ministry of grief must have been the memory of the boy Mamillius, the noblest and dearest to our hearts of Shakespeare's children. When the great day came (is it fanciful to note?) Hermione embraced her husband in silence; it was to her daughter that she first spoke.

The end, certainly, is reconciliation, mercy; mercy extended even to the unworthy, in a spirit of something more than mere justice; as, in those dark plays of Shakespeare's great penultimate period, the end came with a sort of sombre, irresponsible injustice, an outrage of nature upon her sons, wrought in blind anger. We close *The Winter's Tale* with a feeling that life is a good thing, worth living; that much trial, much mistake and error, may be endured to a happier issue, though the scars, perhaps, are not to be effaced. This end, on such a note, is indeed the mood in which Shakespeare took leave of life; in no weakly optimistic spirit, certainly, but with the air of one who has conquered fortune, not fallen under it; with a wise faith in the ultimate wisdom of events.

1890.

VI. TITUS ANDRONICUS AND THE TRAGEDY OF BLOOD

In considering the main question in regard to *Titus Andronicus*, the question of its Shakespearian or non-Shakespearian authorship, it is well to set clearly before us at the outset the actual external evidence which we have. There is, first, the fact that no edition of the play was published during Shakespeare's lifetime with his name on the title-page. On the other hand, it was admitted into the First Folio in company with the mass of his undoubted work. Meres, in his *Palladis Tamia*, published in 1598, refers to it as a genuine play of Shakespeare: "Witness . . . for tragedy, his Richard II., Richard III., Henry IV., King John, Titus Andronicus, and Romeo and Juliet." But Ravenscroft, who revived and altered the play in the time of James II., says in his preface to an edition published in 1687: "I have been told by some anciently conversant with the stage that it was not

originally his [that is, Shakespeare's], but brought by a private author to be acted, and he only gave some master-touches to one or two of the principal characters."

These conflicting statements have been repeatedly brought into harmony by believers in Shakespeare's entire authorship, part-authorship, and non-authorship, so as to prove that Shakespeare did and did not write the whole play, and that he wrote some part of it. The fact is, they are at the mercy of every theorizer, and can be easily bent to the service of any predetermined hypothesis. The absence of Shakespeare's name from the title, from one point of view a strong proof of an un-Shakespearian authorship, may be met by the obvious cases of *Richard II.*, *Richard III.*, and other unsigned first editions of undoubtedly genuine plays. The attribution of the play to Shakespeare by Meres and the editors of the First Folio, apparently a still stronger proof that he really wrote it, may be almost as easily explained by supposing Ravenscroft's tradition to be true, namely, that Shakespeare revised for the stage a play written by someone else, and that his name thus came to be more

and more closely associated with it, until in time it was supposed to be entirely his work. It is on the internal evidence, and the internal evidence alone, that the burden of proof really rests; all that we can require of a hypothesis intelligibly constructed from the evidence of the play itself, is that it shall not be at variance with the few external facts, on a rational interpretation of them.

We know, almost to a certainty, that Shakespeare's earliest dramatic work consisted in adapting to the stage old plays in the stock of his players' company, and very probably in revising new works by unknown and unskilful playwrights. The second and third parts of *King Henry VI* are examples to our hand of the former manner of work: *Titus Andronicus* may with some probability be conjectured to be an instance of the latter. I shall try to show that such a supposition is the least violent and fanciful that we can well make; accepting Ravenscroft's tradition, not from any particular reliance on its probable authenticity, but because, in the absence of any definite information to the contrary, it supplies me with a theory which most nearly agrees

with my impressions after a careful examination of the text itself.

Titus Andronicus is a crude and violent, yet in certain respects superior, study in that pre-Shakespearian school which Symonds distinguishes as "The Tragedy of Blood." This Tragedy of Blood, loud, coarse, violent, extravagantly hyperbolical, extravagantly realistic, was the first outcome of a significant type of Elizabethan character, a hardy boisterousness of nature, a strength of nerve and roughness of taste, to which no exhibition of horror or cruelty could give anything but a pleasurable shock. A popular audience required strong food, and got it.

In the early days of the drama, when playwrights were as yet new to their trade, and without much sense of its dignity as an art, this popular style of tragedy, in the hands of its popular manufacturers, was merely horrible. There were blood and vengeance, strong passions and unrestrained wantonness, but as yet there was no conception of the difference between the horrible and the terrible. Later on, in the hands of Shakespeare and Webster, the old rank Tragedy of Blood, the favourite

of the people, became transformed. The horrible became the terrible, a developed art guided the playwright's hand in covering with a certain magnificence the bare and grim outlines of malevolence and murder. It was the same thing, and yet new. The plot of *Hamlet* is the plot of a Tragedy of Blood of the orthodox school, it has all the elements of *The Spanish Tragedy*, but it is fused by imagination, humanized by philosophy, while the ungainly melodrama of Kyd is a mere skeleton, dressed in ill-fitting clothes, but without flesh and blood, without life.

A careful examination of the plays left to us of the period at which *Titus Andronicus* must have been written will show us the exact nature of this species of bloody tragedy, its frequency, and its importance and influence. There may be traced a foreshadowing of it in the copious but solemn blood-shedding of the very first English dramas, the pseudo-classical *Gorboduc* and *The Misfortunes of Arthur*. In these plays, behind the cold and lengthy speeches of the dramatic personages, a wonderful bustle is supposed to be going on. In the argument to *Gorboduc* we read: "The sons fell to division

and dissension. The younger killed the elder. The mother . . . killed the younger. The people . . . rose in rebellion and slew both father and mother. The nobility assembled and most terribly destroyed the rebels." In *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, a more loathsome story, filled with murder and rapine, serves as plot to a tragedy of stately speeches. As yet there is no attempt to move by thrilling; a would-be classical decorum is preserved in the midst of carnage, and the sanguinary persons of the drama comment on their actions with singular gravity. But while the barbarous violence of action is reported as having happened, with a steady suppression of sights and details of blood, it is already potentially present in the background, in readiness for more powerful use by more powerful playwrights.

In *Jeronymo* (or *Hieronymo*) and *The Spanish Tragedy*, in reality a single play of colossal proportions, we have perhaps the first, and at once the foremost, representative of the genuine Tragedy of Blood. The stilted and formal phraseology is still employed, in a much modified and improved form, but there is a real

attempt to move the hardy susceptibilities of an audience; the murders occur on the stage, and are executed with much fierceness, and the language of overblown rant is at least intended (and was probably found) to be very stirring. The action of both plays is slow, dull, wearisome, without vivacity or naturalness; the language alternates from the ridiculously trivial to the ridiculously inflated; while in the way of character there are the very slightest indications of here and there a mood or a quality. But the play is important by reason of its position at the head of a long line of tragedies, containing more than one of the dramas of Marlowe, and scarcely coming to an end in the masterpiece of Webster.

The keynote of Kyd's conception of tragedy is murder. Of that most terrible of tragedies, the tragedy of a soul, he is utterly unconscious. Actual physical murder, honourably in the duel, or treacherously by the hand of one of those wonderful villains who live and move and have their being on the Elizabethan stage: this is the very abracadabra of his craft. A fine situation must have a murder or two in it. A troublesome character must be removed by

a murder, and the hero and heroine must also be murdered, for the sake of pathos, and a rounded termination, one after the other. Last of all the villain, or the two or three villains, as is more likely, meet with unexpected violent endings, thereby affording a moral lesson of the most practical and obvious kind. In addition there should be a madness, and several atrocities. Madness, only second though distinctly second, to murder, is an ingredient in many of these plays, notably *The Spanish Tragedy*. It was Hieronymo's madness that attracted that greater poet of the famous "additions," Jonson or another, who, finding it a thing of nought, a conventional, frigidly rhetorical, stage lunacy, left it a thing of pity and terror.

Contemporaneous with *The Spanish Tragedy* but less representative of the movement, are several other melodramas; the anonymous *Soliman and Perseda*, and Peele's *Battle of Alcazar*, for instance. Becoming, not more human, but more artistic, the Tragedy of Blood found a willing exponent in the great, daring, but unballasted genius Marlowe, and in the authors of *Lust's Dominion*.

It is to this period that *Titus Andronicus* belongs; a period of more mature art, more careful construction, more power of characterization, but of almost identical purpose. These plays are distinguished from *The Spanish Tragedy* on the one hand, but they are after all still more sharply distinguished from *Lear*, *The Duches of Malfi*, or even *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and the harsh, powerful dramas of Marston, on the other.

Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* is the most generally known of the Tragedies of Blood, and it is indeed not an ill specimen of the developed style. Marlowe, who originated so much, cannot be said to have originated this manner. It was popular before his time, but, finding in it a certain affinity with his own genius, he attempted it, once, perhaps twice, and in stamping it in his own mint raised its currency. *The Jew of Malta* belongs distinctly to the school of Kyd, but it is raised above its precursors, not only by reason of the frequent splendour of its poetry, but still more by the presence of a finely-imagined character, an idealizing of the passion of greed. The play is Barabas; with his entrance and exit the

good in it comes in and goes out. The captains, brutes, and bullies, the shadowy Abigail, all the minor characters, are hasty sketches, rank if not bodiless, mere foils to the malevolent miser. Barabas himself, as it has been so often pointed out, is a creation only in the first two acts, where he foreshadows Shylock; in all the later portion of the play he is only that " monster with a large painted nose " of whom Lamb has spoken. Marlowe and Shakespeare, it is sad to recollect, alike degraded their art, Marlowe more than once, Shakespeare at least once, to please the ears of the groundlings. The intentional debasement of Barabas, in the latter half of *The Jew of Malta*, from a creation into a caricature, is only equalled, but it is equalled, by that similar debasement of Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, from the prophet and philosopher of this world's cakes and ales into an imbecile buffoon, helpless, witless, and ridiculous.

Lust's Dominion, a play issued under the name of Marlowe, but assigned by Mr. Collier, with great probability, to Dekker, Haughton, and Day, is a play of the same class as *The Jew of Malta*, overloaded to an inconceivable

extent with the most fiendish crimes, but in several scenes really beautiful and fanciful, and containing, like *The Jew of Malta*, a single predominant character, the villain Eleazar, drawn with abundant strength and some precision. This play is the very quintessence of the Tragedy of Blood; crammed from end to end with the most ingeniously atrocious villanies, but redeemed from utter vulgarity by a certain force and even delicacy of expression, and a barbaric splendour of horror not untinged with ferocious irony. It is a work of art, if of a gross and immature kind, in a sense in which *The Spanish Tragedy* is not. The old outlines remain, but they are filled in with bold but glaring colouring, with coarsely-painted human figures, and are set in a distinct, though loud, key of colour. The thing is revolting, but it is no longer contemptible.

Between these two plays, but rather in company with the former than the latter, I would place *Titus Andronicus*. Like *The Jew of Malta* and *Lust's Dominion*, it contains the full-length portrait of a villain; like *The Spanish Tragedy*, its most powerful

scenes are devoted to the revengeful madness of a wronged old man.

In construction *Titus Andronicus* belongs distinctively to the Tragedy of Blood: it is full of horrors and of bloodthirsty characters. There are, if I remember rightly, thirteen murders and executions, besides various outrages and mutilations, in the course of the play. More than half, including a torture and a banquet of human flesh, are enacted on the stage. As regards the characters, there is in Titus a fine note of tragic pathos, in Aaron a certain vigour and completeness of wickedness, in Tamora a faint touch of power, but in Lavinia, in Bassianus, in Saturninus, in the sons of Titus and Tamora, scarcely the semblance of an attribute. The powerful sketch of Aaron is a good deal indebted to the Barabas of Marlowe. There is much the same comprehensive malevolence, feeding on itself rather than on any external provocation; a malevolence even deeper in dye, if less artistic in expression. Both have a delight in evil, apart from the pleasure anticipated from an end gained: they revel in it, like a virtuous egoist in the consciousness of virtue. Eleazar,

in *Lust's Dominion*, is a slightly different type of the complete villain. His is a cold, calculating wickedness, not raving nor furious, but set on a certain end. He enjoys his villany, but in a somewhat sad and sober fashion. He is supremely ambitious; to that ambition all other qualities of evil bow, his lust, his cruelty, his spite, his pride; everything. He uses his passions and the passions of others as trained servants; and he sets them tasks, always for his advancement. The three villains, Barabas, Aaron, and Eleazar, are three of the earliest, three primary types, of that long series in which the Elizabethan dramatists attempted to read the problem of Renaissance Italy: of wickedness without moral sense, without natural conscience, wickedness cultivated almost as an æsthetic quality, and attaining a strenuous perfection.

The character of Titus is on a higher plane than that of Aaron; it has more humanity, and a pathos that is the most artistic quality of the play. Titus is the one character, absolutely the only one, who moves us to any sympathy of emotion. The delineation is unequal, there are passages and scenes of mere incoherency

and flatness, speeches put into his mouth of the most furious feebleness, but at its best, in the later scenes of half real and half pretended madness, the character of Titus is not so very much below the Hieronymo of the "additions." At its worst it sinks to almost the level of the original Hieronymo. Such curious inequality is not observable in any other person of the play. Aaron and Tamora are the Aaron and Tamora of a single conception, worked out with more or less skill on a level line. The dummies of the play are consistent dummies. Lavinia is a single and unmixed blunder. But Titus, by his situation the most interesting character of the play, is at one time fine, at another foolish, in a way for which it is difficult to account if a single author wrote the whole play.

Lavinia, I have said, is a single and unmixed blunder. There is no other word for it. I can never read the third scene of the second act without amazement at the folly of the writer, who, requiring in the nature of things to win our sympathy for his afflicted heroine, fills her mouth with the grossest and vilest insults against Tamora, so gross, so vile, so

unwomanly, that her punishment becomes something of a retribution instead of being wholly a brutality. There is every dramatic reason why the victim should not share the villain's soul, every dramatic reason why her situation should be one of pure pathos. Nothing but the coarseness of nature of the man who first wrote it can explain the absurdity. And this is Shakespeare's first heroine, the first of the series which ends with Imogen, in the opinion of those critics who assign the whole of *Titus Andronicus* to the young Shakespeare! The character of Lavinia is alone enough to disprove this opinion; and the character of Lavinia only belongs to the general conception of the play, which is not at all better than might be expected of a clever follower of approved models, a disciple of Marlowe in his popular melodrama. But when we have said this, we have not said everything. The beauty and force of certain passages, and the impressiveness of certain scenes, are so marked, and so markedly above the level of the surrounding work, that we may well hesitate to deny to Shakespeare all part or lot in it.

Two positions I think we are justified in

assuming. First, that *Titus Andronicus* is so absolutely unlike all Shakespeare's other early work, that it is, to say the least, improbable that the whole play can be his; and second, that the assumption of a revision by him of another man's work is, on the face of it, quite probable and likely. Shakespeare's first original plays were bright, fanciful, witty, dainty comedies, touched with the young joy of existence, full of irreflective gaiety and playful intellect; nowhere dwelling on things horrible and unpleasant, but rather avoiding the very approaches of anything so serious as tragedy. It was the Court Comedies of Lyly rather than the Bloody Tragedies of Kyd which influenced the earliest dramatic writings of Shakespeare. *Romeo and Juliet*, a romantic drama with a tragical ending, but not a tragedy in the sense in which *King Lear* is a tragedy, shows us very distinctly the manner in which Shakespeare, even at a much later period than the latest assignable to *Titus Andronicus*, dealt with the sadnesses and incongruities of life, with sorrow, loss, death, affliction, wrong. There is not a touch, not a tone of horror; all sorrow resolves itself into "tears of perfect

moan;" all tragedy dies upon a song. It is exquisitely pathetic, but there is little hint of the unspeakable pathos of *Lear*. Now *Titus Andronicus* is full of gross horror, sickening with the scent of blood, materially moving. It seems nothing less than impossible that the same hand should have written, first this play, in which the playwright revels coarsely in blood and horror; then *Romeo and Juliet*, in which a tragic story is treated with only a lyrical rendering of the tragedy; then *King Lear*, burdened with an almost intolerable weight of terror, but kept sweet, and pure, and fair by the twin quality of pity. Unless Shakespeare wrote *Titus Andronicus* he never touched tragedy without making it either lyrically pathetic or piteously terrible. And it is only natural to suppose that he never did, and never could have done so.

On the other hand, taking into consideration the differences of workmanship traceable in the play, and the comparative force and beauty of certain parts, it is not impossible that Shakespeare had, if not a hand, at least some finger in it. It is known that he was at one time the "Johannes-fac-totum" of a players' company

and that he was employed in furbishing up old plays for fresh performance. Suppose a new play, by a "private author," written, somewhat clumsily, in a popular style, to be offered to the theatre: what would be more likely than that the thing should be handed over to the dramatic journeyman, young Shakespeare, for brief revision and rectification? Young Shakespeare, little as he may care for the style, of course must hold himself subservient to the ideals of the original playwright; but he heightens, where he can, the art of the delineations, inserts some passages of far more impressive significance, perhaps almost some scenes, and touches the dead level of the language into something of grace and freshness. Thus we have a stupid plot, a medley of horrible incidents, an undercurrent of feeble language; and, in addition, some powerful dramatic writing, together with bright passages here and there, in which a fresh and living image is expressed finely.

Coleridge's fancy or theory as to Shakespeare's way of dealing with a play in revising it; beginning indifferently, adding only a line here and there, but getting more interested

as he went on, applies very well to *Titus Andronicus*. All the first act is feeble and ineffectual; here and there a line, a couplet, a short passage, such as the touch on mercy, or the speech of Titus (I. i. 187–200) puts a colour on the pale outline, and permits us for a moment to think of Shakespeare. But the "purple patches" are woefully far apart. Such entire brainlessness as goes to the making of the very important piece of dialogue between the 270th and the 290th lines of the first scene of the first act, is scarcely to be found throughout the whole play. All the business of the act is confused and distorted; lengthy where it should be short, short where it ought to be extended. There is not a touch in it, probable or possible, of the shaping hand of Shakespeare; of itself the act is enough to disprove his authorship of the complete play.

With the second act there is a decided improvement. Aaron, the notable villain of the piece makes his first appearance; Tamora blossoms out into the full flower of wickedness; and in the mouths of these anything but idyllic personages we have some of those

fine idyllic passages which seem not unlike the early style of Shakespeare. For myself, I can see no touch of Shakespeare in the first lines of the act:

"Now climbeth Tamora Olympus' top,"

which some would assign to his account. They are a very tolerable but entirely flagrant imitation of Marlowe's most rhetorical manner; by no means above the reach of the first author of the play, although, in a sense, above his level. But in some later passages it seems not unpermissible to see the token of Shakespeare's hand. The lines from 80 ("She is a woman, therefore may be woo'd" [1]) onward through a speech or two, have unquestionably a truer ring, a more easy flow and vigour,

[1] This adage seems to have been popular in Elizabethan times, and is by no means necessarily a Shakespearian sentiment. Beside the exactly parallel passage in the First Part of *King Henry VI*, and the partly parallel passage in *Richard III*, there is another, tolerably close, in *The Birth of Merlin* (I. i.) one of the so-called "Doubtful Plays," but as doubtful, in an opposite sense, as *Othello:*

> For her consent, let your fair suit go on;
> She is a woman, sir, and will be won.

than the surrounding dialogue. Three lines, a little further on:

> The emperor's court is like the House of Fame,
> The palace full of tongues, of eyes and ears:
> The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf, and dull;

have a genuine impressiveness, and one is almost inclined to refer them to Shakespeare, the more so that they have so much the appearance of an insertion that they could be omitted without the least necessary break in the sense. In the second and third scenes there are several well-known passages, often attributed to Shakespeare: "The hunt is up, the morn is bright and gray," (1–6); the companion piece of the third scene, "The birds chant melody on every bush;" and, again the powerful description of the "barren and detested vale" (91 *et seq.*). None of these are wholly unworthy of Shakespeare's youth. The second passage (scene iii. 10–29, and not by any means ending, as some would have it end, at the 15th line) impresses me as the most melodious and fanciful in the play, and, more than that, a really beautiful interlude. If there is any Shakespeare in the play, this is. But the speech of Tamora (91–108)

powerful as it is in some respects, is somewhat less obviously Shakespearian. In the blundering and foolish scene between Tamora and Lavinia, further on in the third scene, there is, in conception and general execution, about as much of Shakespeare as of Bacon; but nine really pathetic lines (158–166) I should like to think Shakespeare's. Lavinia says to Demetrius and Chiron, referring to Tamora, "Do thou entreat her show a woman pity."

Chi. What! would'st thou have me show myself a bastard?
Lav. 'Tis true; the raven doth not hatch a lark:
Yet have I heard (O could I find it now!)
The lion, mov'd with pity, did endure
To have his princely paws par'd all away.
Some say the ravens foster forlorn children,
The whilst their own birds famish in the nest:
O, be to me, though thy hard heart say no,
Nothing so kind, but something pitiful!

The turn of these lines, particularly the last two, is good; and it will be noticed that Tamora's next speech, "I know not what it is: away with her," might even better have come directly in answer to Lavinia's first appeal:

Do thou entreat her show a woman pity.

The "it" of "I know not what it means" would then naturally refer to the "pity" of

the preceding line; as it is, there is some irregularity in such an answer, referring as it does to nothing more direct than, "O be to me . . . something pitiful!" The lines have quite the appearance of an insertion.

The last three acts are far superior to the first two. They are mainly concerned with the wrongs and madness of Titus, which I suspect to have been entered into by Shakespeare with more sympathy than the other parts of the play, and almost throughout dignified and humanized by him. I do not mean to say that Shakespeare wrote all, or most, of the speeches assigned to Titus throughout the play, or even in the last three acts. The touches by which a great poet can raise the work of a small poet from puerility to fineness may be slight and delicate; and are, indeed, far too delicate to be distinguished and emphasized by the critic. Nor is the service, which I suspect Shakespeare to have rendered his predecessor, complete. Not a few empty and rhetorical passages put into the mouth of the suffering hero seem like untouched fragments of the former stuff. If anyone will be at the pains to compare,

say the speech of Titus at line 65 (Act III) with the speech of Titus at line 33, he will see, I cannot but think, a considerable difference; and a glance at the tawdry rant of Marcus, at the close of the second act, will still further emphasize the contrast if compared with, say, the five lines of the same speaker at line 82 of the third act. In all the earlier part of the play, and throughout in perhaps every character but Titus, such touches of Shakespeare as we can distinguish are occasional, and are merely brief additions and revisions of single passages. But in the "magnificent lunacy" of Titus (as Symonds rightly calls it) there is a note of tragic pathos which seems to me distinctly above the reach of an imitative dramatist of the School of Blood. How much of Shakespeare there is in this latter part of the play it is hazardous to conjecture. We cannot so much point to certain lines, as in the earliest acts, and say, "This reads like Shakespeare;" but we perceive a finer spirit at work, and the keener sense that went to the making or mending of some whole scenes, or main parts of them. Swinburne has pointed out that the significant arrow-scenes are written

in blank verse of more variety and vigour than we find in the baser parts of the play; and these, he adds, if any scenes, we may surely attribute to Shakespeare. I would add some part, by no means all, of the second scene of the fifth act; especially that grimly ironical passage from the 80th line onwards about twenty lines. The first 60 lines of the scene, powerful as they are, have no Shakespearian quality in them: they are directly studied from Marlowe, no doubt by the "private author," who was certainly a disciple of Marlowe, and not without a measure of cleverness. Again, the devilish utterances of Aaron (Act V. sc. i.) some of the most noticeable speeches in the play, are absolutely un-Shakespearian, while distinctly in the manner of Marlowe. Indeed, so closely are they imitated from the confession of Barabas (*Jew of Malta*, Act II. sc. ii.) that we can hardly be surprised at the occasional attribution of the play to Marlowe; worse than foolish as this is on every really reasonable ground. All the ending of the play, the grotesquely horrible dish of human flesh, the tortures, is, of course, entirely due to the original author. Nothing is more clearly and

more closely connected with the model Tragedy of Blood; and nothing certainly could be more unlike Shakespeare.

Thus we see, on glancing through the play, that *Titus Andronicus*, in its plot, general conception, and most of its characters, belongs distinctly to the Tragedy of Blood, and, being in these respects inferior to the best of it, may be considered the work of a disciple of the school, not of an acknowledged master; while in certain parts it seems to be lifted above itself, vivified and dignified: a combination which naturally suggests the revision of an inferior work by a superior master. The closer we examine it, the more natural does this view become, and the more probable does it seem that in *Titus Andronicus* we have the work of an unknown writer revised by the young Shakespeare. To consider it the work of an amateur, a disciple of the School of Blood, but not a great writer, raised to its present interesting and imperfect state by Shakespeare's early revision (which is substantially the Ravenscroft tradition) seems to explain the otherwise inexplicable mixture in this singular play of good and bad, twaddle

and impressiveness; and seems to explain, on the one hand, why it is so good as it is, on the other, why it is no better. I do not think it is very sensible to try to assign the play, as originally written, to some well-known author of the time, such as Greene or Marlowe, rather than to the "private author." Such resemblances of these writers as occur might naturally be imitations; but to father on Marlowe, in especial, the meaner parts of the play, is a quite gratuitous insult to his memory.

1885.

VII. THE QUESTION OF HENRY VIII

Henry VIII was first printed in the Folio of 1623, where it ends the series of "Histories." The main historical authorities were, in the first four acts, Holinshed's *Chronicles;* in the fifth, Foxe's *Acts and Monuments of the Church*, commonly known as *The Book of Martyrs.* The play is a good deal indebted, directly or indirectly, to a narrative then in MS., George Cavendish's *Life of Cardinal Wolsey*, largely quoted by both Holinshed and Hall, though the book itself was not published till 1641. The play follows its authorities closely, alike in the main course of incident and in the general choice of language; but there are numerous deviations from the chronological order of events.

So far we have dealt with facts: what remains must be but conjecture. It is as well to say frankly that we know with certainty neither who wrote *Henry VIII*, nor when it was written. I shall give, first, the scanty records, the few external facts relating to the

play; then, the various theories which have been brought forward as to its date and authorship; not having much hope of being able, finally, to speak myself on all points with the enviable assurance of one whose mind is fully and confidently made up.

The first allusion to a play on the subject of Henry VIII is found in an entry in the Stationers' Registers under date February 12, 1604–5: "Nath. Butter] yf he get good allowance for the Enterlude of K. Henry 8th before he begyn to print it, and then procure the wardens hands to yt for the entrance of yt, he is to have the same for his copy." This play, which Collier "feels no hesitation" in supposing to be the play which we find in the Folio, may more reasonably be identified with the rough and scrambling historical comedy of Samuel Rowley, *When you see me, you know mee; or, the famous Chronicle Historie of King Henrie the Eight, with the berth and vertuous life of Edward Prince of Wales*, which Nathaniel Butter published in 1605. It is a bluff, hearty, violently Protestant piece of work, the Protestant emphasis being indeed the most striking thing about it. The verse is

formal, with one or two passages of somewhat heightened quality; the characters include a stage Harry, a very invertebrate Wolsey, a Will Sommers whose jokes are as thin as they are inveterate, a Queen Katharine of the doctrinal and magnanimous order, a modest Prince Edward; with minor personages of the usual sort, and, beyond the usual, a Dogberry and Verges set of watchmen, with whom, together with one Black Will, King Henry has a ruffling scene. The play was reprinted in 1613, in 1621, and again in 1632.

The next allusion which we find to a play on the subject of Henry VIII is in connection with the burning of the Globe Theatre on June 29, 1613. Among the Harleian MSS. there is a letter from Thomas Lorkin to Sir Thomas Pickering, dated "the last day of June, 1613," in which we read: "No longer since than yesterday, while Bourbege his companie were acting at y^{e} Globe the play of Hen=8, and there shooting of certayne chambers in way of triumph, the fire catch'd." On July 6, 1613, Sir Henry Wotton writes to his nephew: "Now to let matters of state sleep; I will entertain you at the present with what hath

happened this week at the Bank-side. The king's players had a new play, called *All is True*, representing some principal pieces of the reign of Henry the Eighth, which was set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of pomp and majesty, even to the matting of the stage; the Knights of the Order, with their Georges and Garter, the guards with their embroidered coats, and the like: sufficient in truth, within a while, to make greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous. Now King Henry, making a mask at the Cardinal Wolsey's house, and certain cannons being shot off at his entry, some of the paper or other stuff wherewith one of them was stopped, did light on the thatch, where, being thought at first but an idle smoke, and their eyes more attentive to the show, it kindled inwardly, and ran round like a train, consuming, within an hour, the whole house to the very ground." A ballad written on the occasion of "The Lamentable Burning of the Globe Play-House on S. Peter's Day" has for the refrain of every stanza:

> O sorrow! O pitiful sorrow!
> And yet it All is True;

an evident allusion to the title of the play whose performance ended so disastrously. The ballad mentions that

> The fearful fire began above
> By firing chambers too;

and we learn from another stanza that the trial of Katharine formed a part of the action:

> Away ran Lady Katharine,
> Nor waited for her trial.
> Such trial was not in her part;
> Escape was all she had at heart.

In the 1615 edition of Stowe's *Annales*, "continued and augmented by Edmond Howes," we read under date 1613: "also upon St. Peter's Day last the playhouse or theatre, called the Globe, upon the Bankside, near London, by negligent discharging of a piece of ordnance close to the south side thereof, took fire, and the wind suddenly dispersed the flame round about, and in a very short space the whole building was quite consumed, and no man hurt; the house being filled with people to behold the play, viz., of Henry the Eighth: and the next spring it was new builded in far fairer manner than before."

It will thus be seen that in 1613 a play on the subject of Henry VIII was being acted at the Globe under the name of *All is True*. It is described by Sir Henry Wotton as "a new play." Further, it represented "King Henry making a mask at the Cardinal Wolsey's house," where chambers were discharged in his honour, as in the Folio *Henry VIII*, i. iv. (stage direction, after line 49: "Drum and trumpet, chambers discharged"). It also apparently contained a scene in which Katharine was brought to trial. The name *All is True* is perfectly appropriate to the play which we have in the Folio, and in the Prologue there are three expressions which may be taken as references to such a title: line 9: "may here find *truth*, too;" line 18: "To rank our chosen *truth* with such a show;" and line 21: "To make that only *true* we now intend." So far, we have a certain show of evidence, very slight indeed, which might lead us to suppose (in the absence of other evidence to the contrary) that the play *All is True*, acted as a new play at the Globe in 1613, was that which is printed as *Henry VIII* in the First Folio of Shakespeare. There is nothing, how-

ever, to tell us that this play of 1613 was by Shakespeare.

Leaving for the present the question of date, we must now consider the more important question of authorship. And here we should premise that the fact of *Henry VIII* having been printed in the First Folio is far from being a conclusive argument on behalf of its genuineness, whole or partial. The editors of the First Folio had an elastic sense of their editorial responsibilities. They admitted *Titus Andronicus* and the three parts of *Henry VI*, which it is practically certain that Shakespeare did no more than revise; as well as *The Taming of the Shrew*, which we know to be a recast of the earlier play *The Taming of a Shrew*. They did not admit *Pericles*, which was published in Quarto under Shakespeare's name, universally recognized at the time as his, and, in the greater part of it, so obviously Shakespearian that its authenticity could not have been seriously doubted.

The first to call attention to the metrical peculiarities of *Henry VIII* was a certain Mr. Roderick, Fellow of Magdalen College, Cambridge, some of whose notes are given in the

sixth and posthumous edition of Thomas Edwardes' *Canons of Criticism*, published in 1758. Roderick notes (1) that "there are in this Play many more verses than in any other, which end with a redundant syllable . . . this Play has very near *two* redundant verses to *one* in any other Play;" (2) that "the *Cæsuræ*, or Pauses of the verse, are full as remarkable;" (3) "that the emphasis, arising from the sense of the verse, very often clashes with the cadence that would naturally result from the metre." "What Shakespeare intended by all this," he adds, "I fairly own myself ignorant."

Before this, Johnson had observed that the genius of Shakespeare comes in and goes out with Katharine, and that every other part might be easily conceived and easily written. Later, in 1819, Coleridge distinguished *Henry VIII* from Shakespeare's other historical plays as "a sort of historical masque or show-play." Even Knight was forced to acknowledge that the moral which he traces through the first four acts has to be clenched in the fifth by referring to history for it. It was not, however, till 1850 that it occurred to

anyone to follow out these clues by calling in question the entire authenticity of the play. In that year the suggestion was made by three independent investigators. Emerson, in his *Representative Men*, treating of Shakespeare, says passingly: "In Henry VIII I think I see plainly the cropping out of the original rock on which his own finer stratum was laid. The first play was written by a superior, thoughtful man, with a vicious ear. I can mark his lines, and know well their cadence. See Wolsey's soliloquy, and the following scene with Cromwell, where—instead of the metre of Shakespeare, whose secret is, that the thought constructs the tune, so that reading for the sense will best bring out the rhythm—here the lines are constructed on a given tune, and the verse has even a trace of pulpit eloquence. But the play contains, through all its length, unmistakable traits of Shakespeare's hand, and some passages, as the account of the coronation, are like autographs. What is odd, the compliment to Queen Elizabeth is in the bad rhythm." In taking it for granted that in *Henry VIII* Shakespeare is to be seen altering an earlier piece

of work, rather than working contemporaneously with another dramatist, or allowing his own work to be altered, Emerson simply follows in the line of Malone's investigations into the construction of the three parts of *Henry VI.* It did not lie within his scope to investigate the matter further; the passage, indeed, in which he states his view, is a digression from his main argument. In August of the same year Mr. James Spedding published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* a paper entitled "Who wrote Shakespeare's Henry VIII?" in which he dealt at considerable length with the question of authorship. "I had heard it casually remarked," he says, "by a man of first-rate judgment on such points [Tennyson] that many passages in *Henry VIII* were very much in the manner of Fletcher. . . . I determined upon this to read the play through with an eye to this especial point, and see whether any solution of the mystery would present itself. The result of my examination was a clear conviction that at least two different hands had been employed in the composition of *Henry VIII*, if not three; and that they had worked, not together, but alternately upon

distinct portions of it." On August 24, 1850, a letter appeared in *Notes and Queries* from Mr. Samuel Hickson (the writer of an investigation into the authorship of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, published in the *Westminster Review* of April 1847) stating that he himself had made the same discovery as Mr. Spedding three or four years back, and desiring (he adds) "to strengthen the argument of the writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, by recording the fact that I, having no communication with him, or knowledge of him, even of his name, should have arrived at exactly the same conclusion as his own." In 1874 the New Shakespere Society republished Mr. Spedding's essay and Mr. Hickson's letter, supporting the theory of double authorship by Mr. Fleay's and Mr. Furnivall's application of certain further metrical tests. In a paper read before the New Shakspere Society, November 13th, 1874, Professor J. K. Ingram expressed himself as not so fully convinced that the non-Fletcherian portion of the play was by Shakspeare as that the non-Shakespearian part was by Fletcher. "In reading the (so-called) Shakspearian part of the play I

do not often feel myself in contact with a mind of the first order. Still, it is certain that there is much in it that is *like* Shakspere, and some things that are worthy of him at his best; that the manner, in general, is more that of Shakspere than of any other contemporary dramatist; and that the system of verse is one which we do not find in any other, whilst it is, in all essentials, that of Shakspere's last period. I cannot name anyone else who could have written this portion of the play" (*New Shakspere Society's Transactions*, 1874, p. 454). Finally, Mr. Robert Boyle, in an "Investigation into the Origin and Authorship of Henry VIII," read before the New Shakspere Society, January 16th, 1885, attempted to prove that Shakespeare had no share whatever in the play, but that the part formerly assigned to him was really written by Massinger, and that Massinger and Fletcher wrote the play in collaboration. Mr. Spedding had accepted the generally-received date of 1612 or 1613, and suggested that the play may have been put together in a hurry on the occasion of the Princess Elizabeth's marriage (February, 1612–1613); Mr. Boyle contended

that the play was not produced till 1616, probably not till 1617, and that it was written to supply the place of *All is True* (possibly Shakespeare's, possibly not) which was destroyed in the Globe fire of 1613.

Such, in brief, are the main theories with regard to the various problems raised by this puzzling play. I have purposely avoided saying much as to the question of date, both because I think there is little to be said, and because this little is rather an inference from, than a support to, whatever theory of authorship we may choose to follow.

That Shakespeare, or that any single writer, did not write the whole of *Henry VIII*, seems to me (to take a first step) practically beyond a doubt. So much we can hardly fail to accept; first, on account of the incoherence of the general action, the failure of the play to produce on us a single, calculated effect; secondly, on the even stronger evidence of the versification. As Hertzeberg remarks, *Henry VIII* is "a chronicle-history with three and a half catastrophes, varied by a marriage and a coronation pageant, ending abruptly with the birth of a child." Spedding rightly notes that

"the effect of this play *as a whole* is weak and disappointing. The truth is that the interest, instead of rising towards the end, falls away utterly, and leaves us in the last act among persons whom we scarcely know, and events for which we do not care. . . . The greater part of the fifth act, in which the interest ought to be gathering to a head, is occupied with matters in which we have not been prepared to take any interest by what went before, and on which no interest is reflected by what comes after." It is not merely that there are certain defects in the construction: defects in construction are to be found in nearly every play of Shakespeare. The whole play is radically wanting in both dramatic and moral coherence. Our sympathy is arbitrarily demanded and arbitrarily countermanded. We are expected to weep for the undeserved sorrows of Katharine in one act, and to rejoice over the triumph of her rival, the cause of all those sorrows, in another. "The effect," as Spedding expressively puts it, "is much like that which would have been produced by the *Winter's Tale* if Hermione had died in the fourth act in consequence of the jealous tyranny of

Leontes, and the play had ended with the coronation of a new queen and the christening of a new heir, no period of remorse intervening." That Shakespeare, not only in the supreme last period of his career, but at any point in that career at which it is possible that the play could have been written, should be supposed capable of a blunder so headlong, final, and self-annulling, is nothing less than an insult to his memory. It is difficult to believe that any single writer, capable of so much episodical power, could have produced a play in which the point of view is so constantly and so unintelligibly shifted.

This is difficult, but it is impossible to believe that any single writer could have produced a play in which the versification obeys two perfectly distinct laws in perfectly distinct scenes and passages. The unanswerable question is: Did Shakespeare at any period of his life write verse in the metre of Wolsey's often-quoted soliloquy (iii. 2, 350–372)? If one may believe the evidence of one's ears, never; nor is the metre so admirable that we can suppose he would take the trouble to acquire it, lacking as it is in all that finer magic,

in all that subtler faculty of expression which marked, and marked increasingly, his own verse. The versification of some portions of the play does undoubtedly bear a considerable resemblance to the later versification of Shakespeare. We have thus in one play verse which is like Shakespeare's and verse which is unlike Shakespeare's. The conclusion is inevitable: two writers must have been engaged upon it. Messrs. Spedding and Hickson agreed in dividing the play as follows. To the writer whose versification is like Shakespeare's (and whom they took to be Shakespeare) they assign i. 1, 2; ii. 3, 4; iii. 2 (as far as line 203); and v. 1. The rest of the play they assign to the other author. Mr. Boyle, in his examination of the play, while substantially following this division, assigns to the Shakespeare-like author iv. 1 (rightly, as I think), and also adds to his share i. 4, lines 1-24, 64-108; ii. 1, lines 1-53, 137–169; and v. 3, lines 1-113. Reading the remaining parts of the play, the parts written in the metre of that soliloquy of Wolsey, so markedly unlike that of Shakespeare, we find that the metre is as markedly similar to that of Fletcher. Compare with this passage

the following typical passage from one of Fletcher's plays, *The False One*, ii. 1:

I have heard too much;
And study not with smooth shows to invade
My noble mind as you have done my conquest.
Ye are poor and open; I must tell you roundly,
That man that could not recognise the benefits,
The great and bounteous services of Pompey,
Can never dote upon the name of Cæsar.
Though I had hated Pompey, and allowed his ruin,
I gave you no permission to perform it.
Hasty to please in blood are seldom trusty;
And but I stand environ'd with my victories,
My fortune never failing to befriend me,
My noble strengths and friends about my person,
I durst not trust you, nor expect a courtesy
Above the pious love you show'd to Pompey.
You have found me merciful in arguing with ye;
Swords, hangmen, fires, destructions of all natures,
Demolishments of kingdoms, and whole ruins,
Are wont to be my orators. Turn to tears,
You wretched and poor seeds of sunburnt Egypt;
And now you have found the nature of a conqueror,
That you cannot decline with all your flatteries,
That when the day gives light will be himself still,
Know how to meet his worth with humane courtesies.
Go and embalm the bones of that great soldier;
Howl round about his pile, fling on your spices,
Make a Sabæan bed, and place this phœnix
Where the hot sun may emulate his virtues,
And draw another Pompey from his ashes,
Divinely great, and fix him 'mongst the worthies.

This gives, in an extreme form, those characteristics which peculiarly distinguish the verse of Fletcher, and which (it will be seen) distinguish equally the passage of *Henry VIII* to which I have referred, and all those portions of the play already indicated; there is the same abundance of double and triple endings, the same fondness for an extra accented syllable at the end of a line (a characteristic which is inveterate in Fletcher, and of which scarcely an example is to be found in the work of any of his contemporaries), the same monotony, the same clash of metrical and sense emphasis. Emerson, in the passage already quoted, defines admirably the difference between this metre and that of Shakespeare; a difference which is indeed so obvious as to make definition seem unnecessary. It may be doubted whether in the whole of Shakespeare there is such a line as this (iii. 2, 352):

> This is the state of man: to-day he puts forth—

where the double ending is composed of two equally accented syllables. Examples by the score could be cited at a moment's notice from any play of Fletcher's, and from Fletcher's

plays alone. May we not therefore feel justified in assigning to Fletcher (in the absence, be it understood, of any distinguishing Shakespearian qualities in the characterization and the language) those portions of the play in which the versification is precisely like that of Fletcher and completely unlike that of Shakespeare or any other known dramatist?

We have now to consider the authorship of the remaining part of the play, the more important part, not only because it contains the famous trial-scene, but because the writer introduced, and doubtless sketched out, the various characters afterwards handled by himself and his coadjutor. Are these characters, we may ask first, worthy of Shakespeare, and do they recall his manner of handling? Is their language the Shakespearian language, the versification of their speeches the Shakespearian versification? Or do the characters, language, and versification seem more in the style of Massinger, or of any other writer?

In looking at the characters in *Henry VIII* we must not forget that they were all found ready-made in the pages of Holinshed. The

same might, to a certain extent, be said of all Shakespeare's historical plays; the difference in the treatment, however, is very notable. In *Henry VIII* Holinshed is followed blindly and slavishly; some of the most admirable passages of the play are taken almost word for word from the *Chronicles*; there are none of those illuminating touches by which Shakespeare is accustomed to transfigure his borrowings. Nor does Shakespeare content himself with embellishing: he creates. Take, for example, Bolingbroke, of whose disposition Holinshed says but a few words; the whole character is an absolute creation. Shakespeare's fidelity to his authorities is not so great as to prevent him from rejecting material ready to his hand where such material is at variance with his own conception of a character. For example, Holinshed records a speech of Henry V before the battle. Shakespeare writes a new one, in marked contrast to it. Again, Holingshed gives a speech of Hotspur delivered shortly before the battle of Shrewsbury. Shakespeare puts quite other words and thoughts into Hotspur's mouth. In both cases Holinshed furnished a speech that might

well have been turned into blank verse; nevertheless, it was set aside. But in *Henry VIII* Holinshed is followed with a fidelity which is simply slavish.

The character of Katharine, for instance, on which such lavish and unreasoning praise has been heaped, owes almost all its effectiveness to the picturesque narration of the *Chronicles*. There we see her, clearly outlined, an obviously practicable figure; and it cannot be said that we get a higher impression of her from the play than we do from the history. The dramatist has proved just equal to the occasion; he has taken the character as he found it, and, keeping always very close to his authority, he has produced a most admirable copy, transplanting rather than creating. To speak of the character of Katharine as one of the triumphs of Shakespeare's art seems to me altogether a mistake. The character is a fine one, and it seems, I confess, almost as far above Massinger as it is beneath Shakespeare. But test it for a moment by placing Katharine beside Hermione. The whole character is on a distinctly lower plane of art: the wronged wife of Henry has none of the fascination of the wronged

wife of Leontes; there are no magic touches. Compare the trial scene in *Henry VIII* (ii. 4) and the trial scene in *The Winter's Tale* (iii. 2) I should rather say contrast them, for I can see no possible comparison of the two. Katharine's speech is immeasurably inferior to Hermione's, alike as art and as nature. It has none whatever of that packed imagery, that pregnant expressiveness, that vividly metaphorical way of being direct, which gives its distinction to the speech of Hermione. It is, moreover, almost word for word from Holinshed. As for the almost equally famous death scene, I can simply express my astonishment that anyone could have been found to say of it, with Johnson, that it is "above any other part of Shakespeare's tragedies, and perhaps above any scene of any other poet, tender and pathetic." Tender and pathetic it certainly is, but with a pathos just a little limp, if I may use the word, flaccid almost, though, thanks to the tonic draught of Holinshed, not so limp and flaccid as Fletcher often is.

If Katharine is a little disappointing, Anne is an unmitigated failure. That she is meant to be attractive is evident from the remarks

made about her in various parts of the play, in which we are told that she is " virtuous and well-deserving," that she is "a gallant creature and complete," that "beauty and honour" are mingled in her, and the like. And what do we see? A shadow, a faint and unpleasing sketch, the outline of one of those slippery women whom Massinger so often drew. She would sympathize with the queen, and her words of sympathy are strained, unnatural in her; she is cunning, through all her affected primness (" For all the spice of your hypocrisy," says the odious Old Lady to her); and in what we see of her at Wolsey's banquet she is merely frivolous. In all Shakespeare's work there is no such example of a character so marred in the making, so unintentionally degraded (after Massinger's inveterate manner) as this of Anne. I would rather think that Shakespeare began his career with Lavinia than that he ended it with Anne.

Turning to the character of Henry VIII, we find a showy figure, who plays his part of king not without effect. Looking deeper, we find that there is nothing deeper to discover. The Henry of history is a puzzling character, but

the Henry of a play should be adequately conceived and intelligibly presented. Whatever disguise he may choose to assume towards the men and women who walk beside him on the boards, to us he must be without disguise. As it is, we know no more than after reading Holinshed whether the Henry of the play believed or did not believe, or what partial belief he had, in those " scruples," for instance, to which he refers, not without a certain unction. He is illogical, insubstantial, the mere superficial presentment of a deeply interesting historical figure, who would, we may be sure, have had intense interest for Shakespeare, and to whom Shakespeare would have given his keenest thought, his finest workmanship.

A greater opportunity still is lost in the case of Wolsey. We hear a great deal of his commanding qualities, but where do we see them? Arrogance we see, and craft, but nowhere does he produce upon us that impression of tremendous power, of magnificence, in good and evil, which it is clearly intended that he should produce. Is it credible that the dramatist who, in the shape of a swoln and deluded Falstaff, drives in upon us the impres-

sion of the man's innate power with every word that he utters, and through all his buffetings and disgraces, should, with every advantage of opportunity, with such a figure, ready made to his hand, as Wolsey, have given us this merely formal transcript from Holinshed, this "thing of shreds and patches?" How dramatically would Shakespeare have worked the ascending fortunes of the man to a climax; with what crushing effect, and yet how inevitably, brought in the moment of downfall! As it is, the effect is at once trivial and spasmodic, and the famous soliloquies, even, when one looks at them as they really are, but fine rhetorical preachments, spoken to the gallery; fine, rhetorical, moving, memorable, but not the epilogue of a broken fortune, the last words of a bitterness worse than death, as Shakespeare or as nature would have given them. One feels that there is no psychology underneath this big figure: it stands, and then it is doubled up by a blow; but one sees with due clearness neither why it stood so long nor why it fell so suddenly. The events happen, but they are not brought about by that subtle logic which, in *Hamlet* or in *Lear*,

constructs the action out of the character, and so enables us to follow, to understand, every change, however sudden and unlooked-for, in the uncertain fortunes of a tormented human creature struggling with the powers of fate and of his own nature.

Now all this, so incredible in Shakespeare, is precisely what we find again and again in his contemporaries, and nowhere more than in Fletcher and Massinger. In Shakespeare, never neglectful of the requirements of the stage, the picturesqueness is made to grow out of the real nature of things: Fletcher and Massinger, only too often, are ready to sacrifice the strict logic of character to the momentary needs of a dramatic spectacle, the stage-interest of sudden reverses. And in all that I have been saying of the character-drawing which we see in this play, little has been said which would not lead us to assign this work, so far beneath Shakespeare, to such fine but imperfect dramatic poets as Fletcher and Massinger.

I have spoken of the evidences of Fletcher's metre which we find in certain parts of the play, evidences which seem scarcely to admit

of a doubt. But I confess that the metre and language of the non-Fletcherian portion do not seem to me by any means so clearly assignable to Massinger. Massinger's verse is a close imitation of the later verse of Shakespeare; but it is an imitation which stops short at the end of no very lengthy a tether. The verse of the non-Fletcherian portion of *Henry VIII* rings neither true Shakespeare nor true Massinger, and I know of no other dramatist to whom it can be attributed. There are lines and passages which, if I came across them in an anonymous play, I should assign without hesitation to Massinger; there are also lines and passages to which I can recollect no parallel in all his works. Mr. Boyle, in his valuable paper already quoted, gives a certain number of "parallel passages" in support of the Massinger authorship, but I cannot say that they appear to me altogether conclusive. Nor is the argument from supposed historical allusions, by which he assigns the play to 1616 or 1617, a date which would favour the theory that Massinger and Fletcher wrote together, anything more than vaguely conjectural. As I have said before, we really

do not know when this play was written; there is nothing to forbid the assumption that it was a new play in 1613, there is nothing to forbid the assumption that it was not written till 1616 or 1617. The backward limit of date is indeed fixed by the characteristics of the metre; but the very slight evidence which identifies the play of *Henry VIII* as we have it, with the play *All is True*, which was being performed on the occasion of the Globe fire, is not conclusive enough to stand in the way of a later date, should a later date seem to be demanded by other considerations. We are thus free to deal with the question of authorship entirely on internal evidence. The likeness between the verse of Shakespeare and such verse as:

> Turn me away and let the foul'st contempt
> Shut door upon me, and so give me up
> To the sharpest kind of justice

is so close as to seem almost beyond imitation. Yet of two difficulties, is it not easier to imagine someone coming so near to Shakespeare's technique in verse than Shakespeare falling so far below the level of his imagination? I have already given my reasons for believing

that Shakespeare wrote neither the whole nor a part of the play, and that Fletcher did write certain portions of it. But I cannot hold with any assurance that the second author has yet been discovered. It seems not impossible that this second author was Massinger.

1890.

VIII. ROMEO AND JULIET

The play of *Romeo and Juliet* is like a piece of music, and it is the music which all true lovers have heard in the air since they began listening to one another's voices. Here, for once, youth becomes conscious of itself, and of the charm which is passing out of the world with its passing. A young man wrote this wise and passionate eulogy of youth; and it is that contemporaneous heat of blood in it which has kept the names of these two young lovers alive in men's minds as the perfect exemplars of unspoiled love. Love in youth is an emotion that may well seem exaggerated "to animals that do not love"; and if the passion of Romeo and Juliet is at times as clamorous as Italian love in Italian operas, that leaves it perhaps all the more like the thing which it renders so frankly. In Ferdinand and Miranda, in Perdita and Florizel, there is a more subtly human poetry than in Romeo or Juliet; only we

remember that for its poetry, while we remember this as if it were love itself.

Compared with one of Shakespeare's later women, with Imogen, for instance, Juliet is but a sketch; she lives, but only in her love; as Romeo, indeed, but for his love, in any hasty and ardent youth out of whom passion strikes unlooked-for sparks of imagination. But it is precisely by this concentration upon the development and consequences of one impulse, irresistible and yet ineffectual, that Shakespeare has given us, not this or that adorable person who, among other things, loves, but two lovers, who, besides loving, just remember to live. They have but one desire, and this they attain; so that they must be said to have succeeded in life. But they have no force over circumstances; they bend to their will only the consent of a few hours.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which we see the other side of love, played out before the world on the stage of the world, the two eager and calculating lovers have the larger part of a lifetime given to them to love and hate in. This play, as Coleridge has noted,

"should be perused in mental contrast with *Romeo and Juliet*." It is indeed in these two plays that Shakespeare expounds the whole art of love. It may be that he has left something over; for there is another garden besides Juliet's in which Sakuntala walked; and Isolde, in Wagner's music, has added a cry to "the desire of the woman for the desire of the man." But the whole art, certainly, is in those two plays. *Romeo and Juliet* is the breviary of lovers who have loved young and at first sight.

Romeo, when we first see him, is already in love with love; but Juliet has learned nothing yet from experience. To be married, says she, is " an honor that I dream not of." Love has not yet been thought of; marriage, about which she has heard her mother talk, is a grave thing, an honour. When she sees Romeo she gives him her heart as simply as her hand; innocent, unshamed nature speaks out of her mouth with the simplicity of a child saying, I am tired, I am hungry. She is as eager to be loved as if she knew that her moments in the world were counted, and that there is no other earthly flame which

can give a little light and heat on this side of the grave. Turn from that lyric scene in the garden to the scene in which Cleopatra enters leaning on the shoulder of Antony, and saying her slow, experienced first words,

> If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

She has set bounds to her passion, and a narrow limit to love. Love, to her, is hedged in by the senses, and these are mortal. But Juliet, saying the words as her instinct teaches them to her, can say, truly:

> My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
> My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
> The more I have, for both are infinite!

The unrealised idea of love can suggest to her neither reservation nor any ending; she responds to it with the entire energy of her being.

Love, in Romeo and in Juliet, is first an inspiration, then a religion, then a madness. Both awaken as if from a dream, and the awakening is to that true reality which henceforth shuts them off from the world, as if in a deeper dream. The first love-scene

in the garden is a duet of two astonishments. Each is amazed that such a moment can find them, and that they can be ready for such a moment. Instantly it becomes incredible to them that anything else could have happened. They have only to exchange hearts. But that has been done already. When? When Romeo leaves his wife after their one night of love it is with a profound peace that they say over to one another that divine *aubade* which the lark and the nightingale seem to say for them. Death is behind them and before them, and Juliet, looking down on her lover as he lingers in the garden, sees him, with an "ill-divining soul."

> As one dead in the bottom of a tomb.

To the end their love is a sacred madness; it fills every word that they are to speak, as it has filled every corner of their being. It exalts and purifies their words with its own intellectual purity, as it has transfigured their souls; imagination comes into the verse, sweeping it clean of fancy. It is not the same Romeo as the gentle lover of the garden ("I would I were thy bird"), or even as

the grave and tender lover of Juliet's chamber ("How is't, my soul? let's talk, it is not day"), who rises to a kind of triumph as he looks on the dead body, as he thinks:

> For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes
> This vault a feasting presence full of light.
> I will stay with thee;
> And never from this palace of dim night
> Depart again: here, here will I remain
> With worms that are thy chambermaids; O, here
> Will I set up my everlasting rest;
> And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
> From this world-wearied flesh.

Lovers live by apprehension; love makes every man superstitious; and throughout the play there is a continual muttering of omens and presages, like warning notes striking through love-music. We are warned from the beginning:

> These violent delights have violent ends.
> Therefore love moderately; long love does so,
> Take heed, take heed, for such die miserable.

Just before he is to hear the news that Juliet is dead, Romeo has dreamed an ambiguous dream, from which he draws comfort:

> My dreams presage some joyful news at hand.

Hearing of her death, he has but one thing to say, for a calamity so immovable has struck him atheist:

> Is it even so? then I deny you, stars!

In this play, in which love seems to be everything, and nothing else to matter, Shakespeare has created a whole world around these two central figures, and by so doing he has given us, not love in the abstract of a brief lyric, but love living its own deaf and blind life in a world busied about other matters. The action takes place during five days, and in this precipitancy we see Shakespeare's aim at giving us the essential part of love, love in its intensity, not its duration. He begins sharply in the streets, with that "motley dance of all ranks and ages to one tune," as Coleridge says, "as if the horn of Huon had been playing behind the scenes." The atmosphere is prepared; we see hate, Italy, and the heat:

> For now these hot days is the mad blood stirring.

After the fighting with swords comes the fighting of wits. As the swords were drawn idly, for trivial reasons, and by those who had no personal share in the hereditary feud of two

houses, so Mercutio and the other talkers talk for effect, "by art as well as nature," and only then seem to themselves, as they put it, "sociable." This antic and fantastic talk, part Euphues, part fashion of the court, part parody, which, if it has lost some of the bloom of its youth, keeps nimble to this day, may be contrasted with the crueler banter of the Restoration: each images the lighter "form and pressure" of an age, and in only one was there room for poetry. There is youth in Shakespeare's gaiety of humor in this prelude to tragedy; it is as if his genius had not grown wholly accustomed to itself, and must turn every amble into a steeplechase, so eager was it for display, for the mere excitement of exercise.

And outside this society of wits and brawlers, probably so true to the circumstances of Shakespeare's time, there is another homelier group: the old Capulets and the immortal Nurse. The others come, glitter, and fade out; for, when true passions have begun to work, these mummers and jesters have no further place. But the people about Juliet are set there for the sake of their fixed opposition to her quite

otherwise fixed resolve. They are age, custom, the family, the vulgar; they are the world itself, in its lumbering journey along its own road. Shakespeare, after his wont, has been prodigal with them; the comic creation of the Nurse is as full of his genius as the tragic creation of Juliet. Indeed, when he makes her speak, she speaks faultlessly, and is never out of key; while Juliet often speaks for love or for Shakespeare, in the manner of a poet not yet willing to sacrifice the poetry to the drama, and not yet able to fuse drama and poetry in one.

In the Nurse we have the satiric after-part of Greek drama, brought boldly into the midst of the tragic action; in Friar Laurence we have one aspect of the chorus, that aspect in which it fulfilled Schlegel's partial definition, and became "the ideal spectator." The one point fixed, where all else is turning, he represents philosophy among the passions, judging them, humouring them, and helpless and disturbing enough when he has succeeded in setting them moving to his own pattern of abstract wisdom. The Nurse and the Capulets, who would also fetter a

live passion, or teach it the direction in which it should grow, are seen even more helplessly at its mercy. It is with an immense tragic gaiety that Shakespeare shows us this ancient busybody hobbling after her mistress, running her errands and the errands of her mother; looking wisely after affairs, as she and the mother suppose; with all the instincts of the procuress, rendered harmless by the invincible innocence of Juliet. She is the first of those pets and preachers of iniquity who came to ripe philosophy in Falstaff and to the scavenger's wisdom in Thersites.

It is one of the signs of that judgment which was part of the genius of Shakespeare that he should have begun by working on what lay nearest to his hand, and with the materials which he was sure that he had in his possession. It is probable that *Romeo and Juliet* was written a few years after the two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*; and in these poems we see Shakespeare exercising himself, so to speak, by giving the most elaborate expression to sensual and to heroically domestic love. In the comedies there is scarcely a perceptible note of prepara-

tion. Love is a game, a sentiment, a thing of fashion, preference, polite employment; it is worn as an ornament, the heart on the sleeve wholly as a motive of decoration. We are no nearer to genuine passion than is Romeo when he laments over the coldness of Rosaline. "Night's candles" are not yet "burnt out"; the lover has not yet said, "It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!" But the two poems lay down a kind of foundation, solid in the earth, on which to raise this chapel of romantic love. It is through the senses that Shakespeare has found out love, and finding it, he has not plucked the flower away from the rest. The passion of Romeo for Juliet and of Juliet for Romeo is a part of nature; not a whim, not a dream, not a sick fancy bred in the brain, but nature itself. It is sex, although the idea of sex is overflowed by a divine oblivion; Romeo sighs after "the white wonder of dear Juliet's hand," and Juliet's is the most honest, the most day-light passion that has ever been spoken in words; it speaks as straight, feels as deeply, and adds as much courtesy to passion as the heroic love which takes on chivalry without

quitting nature in Gottfried of Strasburg's *Tristan und Isolde.*

Although *Romeo and Juliet* contains certain lines and passages which are as mature in imagination and as brilliant in execution as anything which Shakespeare ever wrote, the main part of the play has all the characteristics of his early, somewhat formal and somewhat exuberant, period. There are not only rhymes in couplets, but crossed rhymes, in fixed stanzas; the blank verse is often monotonous, line following line, for five lines at a time, with unvarying pauses; sometimes it is as bad as

> Away to heaven, respective lenity,
> And fire-eyed fury be my conduct now!

It can rave like "Jeronimo," or split hairs with the painful ingenuity of the period, as in Juliet's series of puns on the word "Ay" and the letter "I." The writing is often self-conscious; the narrative passages have a certain stiffness. We see Shakespeare still unwilling to trust wholly to his ear, to abandon himself frankly to his imagination. In the midst of some of his most splendid writing he

seems to check himself, and stops to write-in a passage on some accepted model.

There is a charm of its own in immaturity, and, for the most part, when it is the immaturity of a vast genius, some rare beauty, growing out of the mere happy accidents of growth, which must be lost with ripeness. Here we have a whole spring-tide of buds; "spring with its odors, its flowers, and its transiency," as Coleridge says, in that exquisite passage in which he turns the play into an allegory of spring. It is the first play in which Shakespeare touches maturity, but he touches it only, and relapses into the defects and graces that belong to an incomparable promise. There are whole passages, like the lament of the Nurse and the Capulets over Juliet, which are purely lyrical, or like answering music. The *aubade* again is frankly music and a song. Juliet's monologue before drinking the sleep-drink is the first of those many curious questionings of death, in which Claudio is to lead the way to Hamlet. It has been said by Hazlitt, with too hasty an emphasis, that "Romeo is Hamlet in love." There are touches in him of what was probably most like

Shakespeare in Hamlet; that is to say, of passionate absorption, of a will which seems infirm because it is too much at the mercy of deeper questionings; but if Romeo sometimes speaks for Shakespeare, a little aside from his character, Hamlet is a wholly consistent part of Shakespeare, detached finally from his creator.

It is natural that *Romeo and Juliet* should always have been a favorite with actors. It is full of pictures; it appeals to the most popular of the emotions; its poetry is only too well fitted for recitation. There never was an actress under fifty who did not feel herself a Juliet, or an actor under sixty who did not see himself as Romeo. For once, Shakespeare wrote great poetry which the mob could not but love, could not but find itself at home with. Juliet is the Englishman's symbol for Helen; and Shakespeare has made her the name for virtue in love, fatal indeed to herself and to Romeo, but innocently fatal, and, unlike Helen, healing by death the discord which has not been stirred up by her life. We are far from "the couple of unfortunate lovers" of Brooke's *Tragicall History*

of Romeus and Juliet, "written first in Italian by Bandell, and nowe in Englishe by Ar. Br.," one of Shakespeare's sources, whom Brooke hastily shows us "finally, by all means of unhonest life, hasting to most unhappy death." "The two hours' traffic of our stage" was, to Shakespeare, concerned with "the misadventured piteous overthrows" of "a pair of star-crossed lovers": he lays the blame on no one, not even on fate, giving us the story as it happened;

> For never was a story of more woe
> Than this of Juliet and her Romeo,

he adds quite simply.

1903.

IX. CYMBELINE

If it could be assumed, with any strong probability, that *Cymbeline*, which ends the First Folio, was really the last play which Shakespeare wrote, several difficulties which present themselves in connection with it might be resolved at once. It contains one of the most perfect of Shakespeare's women, two gallant boys, a notable villain, with rapid, summarising studies in jealousy, a murderous queen, a royal clown, done as if from memory, or on second thoughts. There are pastoral scenes in it which can only be compared with the pastoral scenes in *The Winter's Tale*; and they are written in verse of the same free and happy cadence. Yet the play is thrown together loosely, rather as if it were a novel, to be read, than a play, to be acted. The action is complicated here, neglected there. A scene of sixteen lines is introduced to say that the tribunes are required to raise more forces for the war, and that Lucius is to be general.

The last scene is five hundred lines long, and has to do as much business as all the rest of the play. The playwright seems no longer to have patience with his medium; it is as if his interest had gone out of it, and he were using it as the only makeshift at hand.

Most artists, at the end of their careers, become discontented with the form in which they have worked. They have succeeded through obedience to this form, but it seems to them that a rarer success lies, uncaptured, outside those limits. They are tempted by what seems lawless in life itself; by what is certainly various and elastic in life. They are impatient with the slowness of results, with their rigidity, inside those inexorable limits. The technique which they have perfected seems to them too perfect; something cries out of chains, and they would set the voice, or Ariel, free.

That spirit, I think, we see in the later plays of Shakespeare, in which not only does metre dissolve and reform, in some new, fluctuant way of its own, but the whole structure becomes vaporous, and floats out through the solid walls of the theatre. Even *The Tempest*,

when I have seen it acted, lost the greater part of its magic, and was no longer that "cloud-capt" promontory in "faery seas forlorn," the last foothold of human life on the edge of the world. What sense of loss do we feel when we see *Othello* acted? *Othello* has nothing to lose; the playwright has never forgotten the walls of his theatre. In *Cymbeline* he is frankly tired of them.

Cymbeline is a romance, made out of Holinshed, and Boccaccio, and perhaps nursery stories, and it is that happiest kind of romance, which strays harmlessly through tragic incidents in which only the bad people come to grief. All the time things seem to be knotting themselves up inextricably; every one is playing at cross purposes with every one, as in a children's game, immensely serious to the children; and one is allowed the thrill which comes out of other people's dangers, and the pleasant consciousness that everything will be all right in the end. There are plays of Shakespeare which are almost painfully real, in their so much more than reality; this play, even in its most desperate complication, is never allowed to come too close to us for

pleasure. We are following the track of a romance, and in countries where no one is sick or sorry beyond measure.

The two central figures of the romance are Posthumus and Imogen, and it is those two unlucky lovers who wander through the forest, seeking and flying from each other, along roads chosen mockingly for them by the fate which lies in things as they are. Posthumus is a new kind of hero of romance. He is a showy gentleman, who has the gift of winning every one to his side, including Imogen.

> By her selection may be truly read
> What kind of man he is,

says the First Gentleman in the first scene, plausibly, but not with knowledge: his praises are to be taken at the valuation of common rumour. Married to an incomparable woman, Posthumus has never known her. To doubt her is not to have known her. The jealousy of Posthumus is circumstantial, a jealousy of dull senses, to which the imagination has never spoken. He doubts her at the first rumour of mere coincidence. I should not say doubts; he has not a doubt; her dishonor

is palpable to him. He hugs the certainty, driving it into him like a knife in a foe's hand. He will not wait to know all that can be said against her; he is convinced from the first. Rage makes him voluble, and then inarticulate; "I'll do something," is all that he is quite sure of. He orders her death, and when he is told that she is dead, he cries:

> I'll die
> For thee, O Imogen, even for whom my life
> Is, every breath, a death.

He is always crying out like a child or a madman, always against sense, too soon or too late. He is the slave of the moment, always in its power for evil; and it is against all his endeavours, and against all probability, that he ends happily, having failed in every attempt to destroy his own happiness. That, perhaps, is the irony, as much as the mercy, of the play.

Of all Shakespeare's women Imogen is the manliest and womanliest. All may say of her, as each man says of the woman whom he loves, that for him she is faultless, whatever faults may be seen in her by others. She is a woman to make virtue its own reward; the

"infinite variety" of the wicked seems to lurk in her under some saintly disguise. If Englishmen can point to this picture of an Englishwoman, and say that it is true to nature, nothing remains to be said in praise of our women. It is in her simplicity that Imogen is greatest. Nothing is too hard for her to do easily, nor does it ever occur to her to hesitate. She puts on boy's clothes without a thought of sex; and when, at the end of the play, she finds her husband again, repentant and ready to receive her, she forgets her disguise, and runs to him, to be thrust away by the inevitable blunderer. She has humour, a witty readiness of speech, exquisitely alert and to the point. Only once does Shakespeare burden her with those forced metaphors and that unnatural ingenuity of discourse which blemish so many of his pages. This is in the scene where she finds the headless body of Cloten in the clothes of Posthumus, and takes the dead man for her husband. Those dreadful lines about—

> His foot Mercurial; his Martial thigh;
> The brawns of Hercules: but his Jovial face—
> Murder in heaven?—How—'Tis gone—

are nowhere exceeded in Shakespeare for sheer unsuitability. Else, Imogen is a model of speech as of honour, justice, and mercy. And, though unbreakable, she has that woman's flexibility which carries her easily through terrifying adventures; she can find herself nowhere where she is not at home; her spirit is always (as Cymbeline says of her, when, at the end,

> Posthumus anchors upon Imogen,

having learned trust at last) a kind of

> harmless lightning hitting
> Each object with a joy.

Round these two lovers, on their difficult way through the entanglements of the story, are grouped one or two brave companions and a motley company of hinderers. Of these the chief is Iachimo. Iachimo is the gentlemanly villain through vanity. His whole intelligence is not let out to evil, as with Iago; he entertains evil unawares, finding some unsuspected kinship there. He believes in his power over women, perhaps rather because he holds them lightly than because he prizes himself highly.

He has probably had experiences in Italy which have seemed to prove the justice of his estimate. The Englishwoman, though a new country for him, awakes none of his suspicions. It is his creed that all women are alike; only, that some have not been tempted. He has smiled at the confidence of husbands; Posthumus is franker than the others, that is all. He fully expects to win his wager.

After he has talked with Imogen for a few minutes, he realises that the wager is lost, if it is to be won honestly. He does not seriously tempt her: he makes his few ornamental passes, and drops the foil; with finesse, after all, convincing her of the innocence of his intentions. His vanity, doubtless, is wounded; and it is really his vanity, alert to defend itself, which sets his "Italian blood" to "operate" so instantly the dishonourable trick of the coffer.

To the Italian, treachery has always been something of a fine art. Machiavelli taught it to princes, and not a gipsy could be cleaner of conscience after a lie than the Neapolitan of to-day. To have lied successfully is to have shown one's ability, much more subtly

than if the struggle had been an open one, strength against strength. Iachimo is a study in the Italian temperament, faultlessly indicated, until his vehemence of remorse at the end of the play brings him to a good end, perhaps not so much in the Italian manner.

The Queen, with her useless poisons which harm no one, belongs to Shakespeare's series of wicked queens, most of them constructed on much the same pattern, but leading upward to a masterpiece in Lady Macbeth. Cymbeline's Queen is, so far as her action is concerned, a busy-body, a meddler; her intentions are criminal, but all she really does is to provide Imogen with a sleeping-draught. She pulls some of the strings of the play, herself something of a puppet. Shakespeare wants the wicked stepmother of all the legends, and he gives us a wicked stepmother who would fit into any of them.

Her son, Cloten, the bullying fool, is one of Shakespeare's mockeries of the gentleman by birth who is scarcely a man by wits. Shakespeare was no flatterer of the people; he respected tyrants, he loved the pomp of kings. But in Cloten he shows us one of the rags

which may go to the making of that pomp, hardly laughing as he holds it out; all the braveries of the world have that side to them. Here and there he gives the pitiable thing a few sound words to say; on "our saltwater girdle," for instance, or the "If Cæsar can hide the sun from us with a blanket, or put the moon in his pocket." Commentators have seen arguments in these generous lendings for supposing that the play was written partly at one time and partly at another; for how, they say, can the "mere fool" of the first act be "by no means deficient in manliness" in the third? It is part of Shakespeare's art to make even stupidity carry divine messages. Even this, the muddiest of his dolts, can transmit heroism by mistake.

That "mountainous country with a cave," in Wales, on which Cloten intruded, to his destruction, is the scenery of the most bracing scene in Shakespeare. Here we breathe mountain air, and are among natures as free and healthy. These folk of the high rocks, with their princely manners, their high natural courtesy, live courtly lives in the open air, and attend with ceremony upon every action.

Shakespeare is careful to explain that the two boys are none of "nature's gentlemen," but princely by birth, though brought up not to know it; and that the old man is really a great lord in exile. He bids us look on what is intrinsic in noble descent, after having seen how that too, like all natural forces, can be flawed in a Cloten. Guiderius and Arviragus are indeed brothers to Imogen, tempered in the same steel. They are to other men almost what she is to other women. She has been unspoilt by civilisation; they, untouched by it.

It is around this old man and these delightful boys that most of what is best in the play, most after Shakespeare's heart, we may be sure, takes place. Lyric beauty, not only in the incomparable dirge, fills these scenes with enchantment. Hardly in *The Winter's Tale* are there tenderer things said about flowers; nowhere are there more joyous things said about light, air, and the gentleness and energy of mere life in the sun and wind. And, always, blithely and instinctively in the two boys, with the gravity of experience in the old man, there is that nobility of soul which is

perhaps the part of Shakespeare's genius which grew most steadily to the last.

His feeling for nature, also, grew or matured steadily. Shakespeare loved, no doubt, the woods of Arden and the forest ways of *The Midsummer Night's Dream*. He could play with them, for happy, sufficient purposes of his own. But it was not till his work was ending, and he had gone through the world, weighing it and judging it, and making it over again after almost its own miraculous pattern of life, that he came to feel the earth. As his art tired, we may think, of the playhouse, so his nature, which had been content with cities, cried out for something which was not in cities. The open air, the sea, the fields, the hills, came to mean to him something which they had never meant.

> The ground that gave them first has them again,

he can say, in *Cymbeline*, of the dead, with a profound sense of the earth, and of our roots there.

In *Cymbeline*, as in all Shakespeare's later plays, the writing is for the most part moulded upon the thought, with a closeness very dif-

ferent from the draped splendours of the earlier work. It is often condensed into a kind of hardness, it would say too much in every word; but it allows itself no other license. Often, in this play, it is chary of occasions for fine writing by the way. Take, for instance, the soliloquy of Posthumus in prison (V. 4). Compare it with Claudio's shuddering prevision of death and of the "thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice" in *Measure for Measure*; with Hamlet's reasoning in the dark of a sensitive imagination, fearful of uncertainties. Both are quick with feeling; each is the outcry of a naked human soul, alone with the fear of death. But Posthumus, who is willing to die, and who believes that "there are none want eyes to direct them the way I am going but such as wink and will not use them," argues coldly with himself, in his only half-hearted invocation of the gods. The soliloquy is a masterpiece of that difficult kind of writing which has to wring a kind of emotion out of the absence of emotion in the speaker. It is packed with thought, with ingenuities of argument, precisely in keeping with the situation.

In the speeches of Imogen there are the same clearness, simplicity, and packed meanings of a singularly direct kind. That soliloquy before the cave of Belarius, beginning

I see a man's life is a tedious one,

is, like the soliloquy of Posthumus, all made up of little sentences, each half a line long, springing naturally and unexpectedly out of the last half line, in that way which Coleridge notes as characteristic of Shakespeare, "just as a serpent moves, which makes a fulcrum of its own body, and seems forever twisting and untwisting its own strength." There is scarcely a figure of speech; the poetry seems too much in earnest, too eager to say definite things directly. It is poetry made out of mere thinking aloud, with all the starts and inconsequences of actual thinking. One of the speeches is the most breathless in Shakespeare.

In the mountain scenes, the verse has not only lyric beauty, but an austere quality which keeps just so much of splendour as can be at the same time grave and subdued. Rhetoric has all gone out of the verse, nothing is loud or showy any longer; there is a new aim at that

last refinement in which strength comes disguised, and beauty seems a casual stranger. The verse itself has been broken, as it has to be broken over again in every age, as soon as it has come to perfection, and hardened there. Read a speech of Imogen after a speech of Juliet, and it will seem to you, at first sight, that Imogen is speaking almost prose, while Juliet is certainly singing poetry. It is in that apparent approach to the form of prose that verse finally becomes its most authentic self. Juliet has her few notes, and no more, her formal tunes; while Imogen can set the whole of Shakespeare's brain to a music as various and uncapturable as the wind.

1907.

X. TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

It is probable that in this play, the most tragical of all comedies and the most comical of all tragedies, Shakespeare for once wrote to please himself; and, though we cannot take literally the publisher's note to the Second Quarto, that "you have here a new play, never staled with the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar," it is not likely that what we now read is precisely what the King's Majesty's Servants acted at the Globe Theatre. What they acted, and what we now read, was certainly not all from the hand of Shakespeare. The Prologue, which appears for the first time in the Second Quarto.

> A prologue armed, but not in confidence
> Of author's pen or actor's voice,

has the cumbrous bombast of a thing made for the occasion; and the concluding scenes of the play, in which Dryden rightly saw "nothing

but a confusion of drums and trumpets, excursions and alarms," have much the same note of forced and laboriously measured writing. They are not like Shakespeare's writing at any period; they may possibly belong to some rough earlier play on the subject, from which Shakespeare, in his easy fashion, was content to take over untouched fragments, together with some of the original framework. The play as we have it, even apart from these doubtful scenes, is uncertainly constructed, and betrays the workmanship of different periods. What we know of its date confirms the suspicion that Shakespeare may have worked at it after its first rough completion. The two quartos, identical but for the new title-page and preface of the second, were published in 1609; but as early as 1599, in the satirical play *Histriomastix*, there is an obvious allusion to a scene in a *Troilus and Cressida* which is coupled with a pun on "shake" and "spear." In 1603 there is an entry in the Stationers' Register relating to James Roberts's unsuccessful attempt to "get sufficient authority" for the printing of "the book of *Troilus and Cressida*"; in Janu-

ary, 1609, the publication of the Quarto is entered. More than one partial revision, at any time during those ten years, with the possible intrusion of the meddling hand of the Prologue-writer, would account for much of what seems difficult, at first sight, to account for in the play as we have it. If we accept the hypothesis of an earlier play, not Shakespeare's, there may have been some clearing away, as well as developing and deepening, of the play as it was first acted by the King's Servants. I can imagine the deeper intention coming gradually into his own work, as he went over it, with some inattentive impatience towards those parts which had still to carry the original meaning, the main weight of the story. Throughout there are ragged ends of action, with one discrepancy in fact between the second and the third scene of Act I., and a transposition, by the printers of the First Folio, of a rhyming tag from the end of the play to the end of the third scene of the last act, as if that had once been the end of the play. Lines are left in careless lengths, now too short and now too long, as if parts had been revised without regard to their context.

The difference between the formal rhymed couplets of some scenes and the free and weighty blank verse of others is the difference between one period and another of Shakespeare's technique. Some of the speeches, written in the later style, are the longest in Shakespeare.

Troilus and Cressida is a kind of *Don Quixote*, in which it is even more difficult to disentangle the burlesque from the serious element. The first aim of Cervantes was to ridicule the folly of courtly romances, to "laugh Spain's chivalry away," so far as the extravagant facts of chivalry were concerned. But on the way he laughed at a thousand other things which are now of more interest to the world, and he made his scarecrow hero one of the most sympathetic victims of romance; the eternal idealist, lovable and ridiculous and lamentable and heroic, and the sport of a rough world which is, after all, always his servant. Shakespeare takes the story of the fall of Troy, the commonplace of poets and romance-writers, a legend almost as sacred as the Bible, and he makes it, in his parody of it, a parable of the world.

Troilus and Cressida is an assaying of accepted values, and Shakespeare takes the two prime heroisms, love and glory (the two fights for honour), and shows them to us through the eyes of Thersites: "Still wars and lechery! nothing else holds fashion." In this picture we see how like we are at our highest to the beasts that perish. Here is Troy, the city of the world's desire; Helen, the desire of the world; the mighty Agamemnon; the wise Ulysses; the hero of heroes, Achilles; Ajax, the bravest of men; Hector, Cassandra, Andromache; and only Hector has any plain nobility, and is not either a coward, a bully, or a fool. It is a Greek who counts that "for every false drop" in the veins of Helen "a Grecian's life hath sunk"; even Hector doubts the wisdom of keeping Helen, though he would still keep up the fight, not for Helen's sake, but for the honour of the cause. None of these "heroes" have any heroical impulses; they fight for their own heads, for spite, because others are fighting. We see the petty inside of war, as, in Cressida and in Helen, we see the shallow and troubled depths of woman. In this morbid, almost

Swiftian, consciousness of the dung in which roses are rooted. Shakespeare drags Thersites out of his sewer and bids us listen to him. Thersites is his chorus, his mouthpiece, his pet scavenger.

Beside Thersites is the other sign-post to the knowledge of evil, Pandarus. Pandarus is love's broker as Thersites is the broker of glory. Each has a different platform from which to rail at the world; but Pandarus is a foul and feeble part of that at which Thersites rails. Thersites is the Falstaff of a world that tastes bitter. He has infinite curiosity; he runs recklessly into danger, in order that he may spy out the mean secrets on which his mind battens. He is beaten, and rails on, saying, "I serve not thee," to the stronger bully against whom he has only the weapon of his tongue. He shares with Ulysses the only brains in two armies of fighters, who know not why they are fighting, and who are drawn into action or out of it for straws; and he sees farther than Ulysses, because he does not see with a purpose. He is Irish in the inventive imagination of his abuse; he has the richest vocabulary of any rogue in Shakespeare. His

speech is a foul glory, a glory fouled. "So much and such savoured salt of wit" is in his words that the foulness is forgotten in the fierce and ever-armed intelligence which, helpless to overthrow, pricks mortally all this "valiant ignorance."

For the most part, in his plays, Shakespeare gives us an underplot which is a kind of echo or reflection of the main story; and here, as a luminous background for Cressida, between Troilus and Diomedes, we see Helen, between Menelaus and Paris. For a moment, as the great lines of Marlowe come into his mind, Shakespeare speaks of Helen, through the mouth of Troilus, with reverence:

> Is she worth keeping? why, she is a pearl,
> Whose price hath launched above a thousand ships,
> And turned crowned kings to merchants!

The wonderful scene between Paris and Helen (Act III., Scene 1) gives, with its touch of luxurious, almost lascivious satire, the Renaissance picture of the two most famous lovers of the world. There is a refrain of "love, love, love," grossly, luxuriously, mockingly. "Let thy song be love," murmurs Helen;

"this love will undo us all. O Cupid, Cupid, Cupid!" And Paris echoes: "Aye, good now, love, love, nothing but love." Helen speaks as grossly as Cressida; Paris twice calls her "Nell." In the dispraise of Helen, from the mouth of Diomedes (Act IV., Scene 1), Shakespeare forces the note, making even those who had least cause rail on the woman with all the contempt of hate. Yet the noblest praise that has ever been said of Helen comes to her in this pity from the undistinguished mouth of a punning servant, who calls her "the mortal Venus, the heart-blood of beauty, love's invisible soul." Later on, in Cleopatra, Shakespeare is to give us the supreme enchantress, taking her wholly from her own point of view, or at least with sympathetic impartiality. Here he seems to ask with Pandarus, "Is love a generation of vipers?" His cruelty with Helen is but a part of his protest, his criticism, his valuation of love. Love in this cloying scene between Paris and Helen appears before us sickly, a thing of effeminate horror, which can be escaped only by turning it into laughter.

Cressida is a symbol of Helen, the feminine

animal shown us in detail. Ulysses sums her up in a few significant lines which say everything:

> Fie, fie upon her!
> There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
> Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out
> At every joint and motive of her body.
> O, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
> That give accosting welcome ere it comes,
> And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts
> To every ticklish reader! set them down
> For sluttish spoils of opportunity,
> And daughters of the game.

She is mere sex, the Manon Lescaut of her period, so incapable of fidelity, so anxious to get her pleasure by pleasing, a coquette, not a criminal, petty with the instincts of the cat, sly and provident, apologetic to the end. From the first she plays at virtue, and is taken for chaste when she is but chary of herself for a purpose.

In Troilus we get the sensual man, brave, passionate, and constant, suffering from passion as from a disease. His speech is often mere extravagance; but once, when he waits for Cressida in the orchard, he speaks perhaps the most sensitive lines in Shakespeare:

I am giddy: expectation whirls me round.
The imaginary relish is so sweet
That it enchants my sense: what will it be
When that the watery palate tastes indeed
Love's thrice-repured nectar! death, I fear me,
Swooning destruction, or some joy too fine,
Too subtle-potent, tuned too sharp in sweetness,
For the capacity of my ruder powers:
I fear it much, and I do fear besides
That I shall lose distinction in my joys,
As doth a battle, when they charge on heaps
The enemy flying.

In those lines we get what is most precise and exquisite in the play, free, for the moment, of all irony; a rendering of sensation sharpened to the vanishing-point; the sensation which does not know itself for pain or pleasure, so inexplicably is it intermingled in the delights of opposites. Much of what seems to us most characteristically modern in modern literature, together with almost the whole aim of modern music, is here anticipated. It is Shakespeare showing us, in a flash, that he may be quite fair, all of ecstasy that does really exist in the thing he holds up to our mockery.

Is it with a kind of cruelty that Shakespeare is so patient with Cressida, setting her to unfold herself before us, little by

little, in scene after scene nicely calculated for her exposure? To be so feminine and so vile, so much a woman, with all the woman's pretty tricks, and so old in craft, an angler for hearts; there is a dreadful and a merciless knowledge in the picture. In the scene in the court of Pandarus (Act IV., Scene 2), Cressida has all the lightness and unwholesome charm of actual, attractive vulgarity; in the scene in the Grecian Camp (Act V., Scene 2), where we hear her words through a series of listeners—Troilus, Ulysses, and Thersites, the lover, the observer, and the mocker—she is vulgar nature naked to the roots and no longer deceptive. Shakespeare is using her to point his moral against her sex; he gloats over her, not to spare her.

People have complained because *Troilus and Cressida* can be set down under no general title; because, as the printers of the First Folio discovered to their confusion, it is neither tragedy, comedy, nor history, but something of each and something else besides. It is made out of history, with an infinite deal of tragedy in the matter of it, and its upshot is purely comic. Here, more than anywhere

else in Shakespeare, we get the comedy of pure mind, with its detachment from life, to which it applies an abstract criticism. Tragedy comes about from an abandonment to the emotions, and the tragic attitude is one of sympathy with this absorption in the moment, this child's way of taking things seriously, of crying over every scratch. To the pure reason emotion is something petty, ridiculous, or useless, and the conflicts of humanity no more than the struggles of ants on an ant-hill. To Thersites's "critique of pure reason" all the heroisms of the world reduce themselves to his fundamental thesis: "all incontinent varlets." Shakespeare uses not only Thersites but Pandarus to speak through, as he escapes the sting of love by making a laughing-stock of the passion under cover of Pandarus's trade, and holds up war to contempt, through the license of the "fool," mimic, and "privileged man" of these "beef-witted lords" who are playing at soldiers.

To write drama from a point of view so aloof is to lose most of the material of drama and all dramatic appeal. It is to make the puppets cry out: See what puppets we are!

When pure mind rules, manœuvres, and judges the passions, we lose as well as gain. We lose the satisfaction of tragedy, the classic "pity and terror," the luxury of tears. We no longer see a complete thing cut boldly off from nature and shown to us labelled. We are condemned to be on the watch, to weigh, balance, and decide. We must apprehend wholly by the intelligence, never by the feelings.

We gain, certainly, in knowledge, width of view, hardihood. We read life, in this bewildering comment on it, not through the eyes of Shakespeare's final wisdom, but as Shakespeare, at one period, read life. It is difficult to believe that *Troilus and Cressida* does not belong to the same period as *Timon of Athens*, and that, in these two illuminating and bitter plays, in which the glories of the world are reviled in so different a temper, to so similar a purpose, Shakespeare is not giving expression to an attitude of mind which was his in an interval of his passage from serenity to serenity. His young comedies have, first, the trivial gaiety of mere youth before the spectacle of the world; then a

woodland breath and sweetness, all the comfort of nature, not tried past forbearance. Tragedy comes into the scheme of things simply as a disturbance natural to life at its height, the shadow pursuing love, beauty, all the graces of the world. The shadow darkens, the colours of life are washed one by one out of it, in a mere inexplicable spoiling of the delicate fabric. At the last we get the ultimate calm of *The Tempest*, which is the calm of one who has suffered shipwreck and escaped. *Troilus and Cressida* is laughter in the midst of the storm; it has all the wisdom that lies in the deepest irony. The wisdom of Shakespeare, as we sum it up from a contemplation of his whole work, is neither optimism nor pessimism, but includes both. It is part of Shakespeare's vital immensity that he can give us in a single play, as in *Troilus and Cressida*, a complete philosophy, which will prove sufficient for the use and fame of more than one great writer who is to come after him; and can then go on his way, creating new aspects from which to see life, as nature itself leads the way for him.

1907.

XI. PHILIP MASSINGER

Philip Massinger was born at Salisbury, and was baptized at St. Thomas's on the 24th November, 1583; he died at London, in his house on the Bankside, and was buried in St. Saviour's on the 18th March, 1638. His father, Arthur Massinger, was a retainer of the Herbert family, in whose service, we learn from the dedication of *The Bondman*, he "happily spent many years, and died a servant to it." The exact significance of the word "servant" used many times in reference to Arthur Massinger's position, is not quite clear; it certainly represents an honorable form of service. Evidence of the respect in which the elder Massinger was held may be found in the letters and despatches of Henry, Earl of Pembroke. One of these, addressed to Lord Burghley, recommends him for the reversion of the office of Examiner in the Court of the Marches of Wales; another refers to him as negotiator in a treaty of marriage be-

tween the Pembroke and Burghley families; yet another describes him as the bearer of letters from Pembroke to the Queen. It has been conjectured that Philip Massinger may himself have been page to the Countess of Pembroke at Wilton, and imaginative historians are pleased to fancy Sir Philip Sidney as his possible godfather. Life at the most cultured and refined house in England, if such favour was indeed granted him, would acquaint the future painter of courtly manners with the minutest details of his subject; and in some of the men and women who met at Wilton he would see the ideal of manly chivalry, and a higher than the ideal of womanly virtue, to which his writings were to bear witness.

The first authentic account of Massinger, after the register of his baptism, is the entry of "Philippus Massinger, Sarisburiensis, generosi filius, nat. an. 18" (Philip Massinger, of Salisbury, the son of a gentleman, aged 18) as a commoner of St. Alban's Hall, Oxford, May 14th, 1602. Wood tells us that "he gave his mind more to poetry and romances for about four years or more, than to logic and philosophy, which he ought to have

done, as he was patronized to that end" by the Earl of Pembroke. Langbaine, on the other hand, asserts that he closely pursued his studies for three or four years, and that he was supported solely by his father. It is difficult for a reader of Massinger to help believing that logic and philosophy alternated evenly enough with poetry and romances. Massinger's Latin, by no means despicable, though it has a tendency to concentrate itself in the very serviceable phrase *Nil ultra*, scarcely suggests the temper of a scholar; but that passionate fondness for argument, and intense devotion to principles in the abstract, visible in every page of his works, would consort very ill with the character of the heedless loiterer on learning indicated to us by Wood. In 1606 he quitted the University abruptly, and without taking a degree. About the same time occurred (it is believed) the death of his father; it has been suggested, on the one hand, that he was by this circumstance deprived of his support (supposing it to have been provided by his father); on the other, somewhat fancifully, that "his father's death bereft him of the heart and hope of his academical studies." But if we believe

Wood's account, his exhibition was from the Earl of Pembroke. The old Earl Henry, Arthur Massinger's patron, had died on January 19, 1601. Philip Massinger, therefore, who went to Oxford more than a year after Earl Henry's death, would owe his support to William (the supposed "Mr. W. H." of Shakespeare's Sonnets), eldest son and successor of the old earl.[1] Why should this support be suddenly and finally withdrawn? Earl William, we are told by Clarendon, was "the most universally beloved and esteemed of any man of that age . . . of a pleasant and facetious humour, and a disposition generous and munificent . . . ready to promote the pretences of the worthy." Why then should he have ceased to promote the "pretences" of such a man as Philip Massinger, the son of one of his father's most trusted retainers? It is conjectured by Gifford that Massinger, "during his residence in the University, had exchanged the religion of his father for one at that time the object of terror, persecution,

[1] The Countess of Pembroke, though living at the time, had been left by her husband so badly provided for, that any assistance from her would be quite out of the question.

and hatred," and had, by becoming a Roman Catholic, alienated the sympathies of the Earl of Pembroke, who is known to have professed a zealous and patriotic Protestantism. "He was a great lover of his country," says Clarendon, "and of the religion and justice which he believed could only support it; *and his friendships were only with men of these principles.*" In support of his hypothesis, Gifford points particularly to *The Virgin Martyr*, *The Renegado*, and *The Maid of Honour*. I cannot think the evidence of these plays conclusive; but, such as it is, it certainly goes a long way in favour of the supposition. Besides the ecclesiastical legends, the curious conversions of *The Virgin Martyr*, the implied belief in baptismal regeneration, and the wonder-working Jesuit of *The Renegado*, Massinger's view of life and tone of moralizing, not in these plays alone, are far removed from the Puritan standpoint, while distinctly and indeed assertively religious. The Roman Catholic religion would naturally have considerable attraction for a man of Massinger's temperament; and he would certainly have every opportunity of association with it in a

University of such Catholic and conservative principles as Oxford.

After leaving the University in 1606, Massinger appears to have gone to London, where, according to Antony Wood, "being sufficiently famed for several specimens of wit, he betook himself to writing plays." The English drama was now at its height; Shakespeare was producing his latest and greatest tragic masterpieces; Jonson, Chapman, Dekker, Middleton, and perhaps Marston, were at their best; Webster was nearing his artistic maturity, and Tourneur flaming out in his sudden phase of short-lived brilliance; Beaumont and Fletcher were about to begin their career. When and how Massinger began to write we are not aware: probably, like most playwrights of the time, he began with adaptation. The first mention of his name as a dramatist occurs in the year 1621, when his comedy *The Woman's Plot* (the play known to us under the name of *A Very Woman*) was performed at Court. During this period of fifteen years he probably produced seven plays, now lost to us through Mr. Warburton's insatiable cook;[1] several others in collabora-

[1] The plays in Warburton's possession, burnt leaf by leaf

tion with Fletcher;[1] and *The Virgin Martyr*, *The Fatal Dowry*, *The Unnatural Combat*, and *The Duke of Milan*. It may be doubted whether Massinger was ever sufficiently popular to make a very good living out of his profession of playwright. We have evidence, in the pitiful document discovered by Malone in the archives of Dulwich College, that in the early part of his career he was reduced to beg urgently for an immediate loan of £5. The document is undated; but it is assigned by Mr. Collier to 1624 or the previous year.

After this melancholy flash of light into the darkness of a somewhat shadowy existence, we learn nothing more of Massinger's personal history up to the time of his death, with the exception of the dates of the licensing of his plays, a few allusions to them, and an infer-

by his cook as covers for pie-crust, were the following: *Minerva's Sacrifice, or, the Forced Lady* (tragedy); *The Noble Choice, or, The Orator* (comedy); *The Wandering Lovers, or, The Painter* (comedy, by Massinger and Fletcher); *Philenzo and Hippolita* (tragi-comedy, altered by Massinger); *Antonio and Vallia* (comedy, altered by Massinger); *The Tyrant* (tragedy); and *Fast and Welcome* (comedy).

[1] The plays written by Massinger and Fletcher together (mostly near about this period) are probably not less than thirteen or fourteen.

ence or two which may be drawn from their dedications. It is interesting to know that Henrietta Maria paid Massinger the unusual compliment of attending the performance of his lost tragedy *Cleander* (produced May 7th, 1634); and that another play now lost, *The King and the Subject*, having been referred by the Master of the Revels to the decision of Charles, the king gave judgment in its favour, contenting himself with striking out a single passage touching too closely on the burning question of Ship-Money, with the words, "This is too insolent, and to be changed."

On the morning of the 17th of March, 1638, Massinger, who had gone to bed on the previous night in apparent health, was found dead in his house on the Bankside. He was buried in St. Saviour's, Southwark; the entry of his interment reads: "1638. March 18th. Philip Massinger, stranger, in the church . . . 2 li." The word "stranger," pathetic as it now sounds, meant nothing more than non-parishioner; and it has been supposed that this fact accounts for the unusual amount of the charge, £2, or double that entered twelve years earlier in the register of the same church

for "John Fletcher, a poet." It is said by Sir Aston Cockayne, in his "Epitaph on Mr. John Fletcher and Mr Philip Massinger," that Massinger and Fletcher, friends and comrades in life, were buried in the same grave.

When Massinger came to London, the English drama, as I have said, was at its height. But before he had begun any dramatic work of importance the turning-point had been reached, and the period of descent or degeneration begun. Elizabethan had given place to Stuart England, and with the dynasty the whole spirit of the nation was changing. Fletcher and Massinger together represent this period: Fletcher by painting with dashing brilliance the light, bright, showy, superficial aristocratic life of wild and graceful wantonness; Massinger by painting with a graver and a firmer brush, in darker colours and more considered outlines, the shadier side of the same impressive and unsatisfactory existence. The indications of lessening vitality and strength, of departing simplicity, of growing extravagance and affectation, which mark the period of transition, reappear in the drama of Massinger, as in that of Shirley,

and sever it, by a wide and visible gulf, from the drama which we properly name Elizabethan. Massinger is the late twilight of the long and splendid day of which Marlowe was the dawn.

The characteristics of any poet's genius are seen clearly in his versification. Massinger's verse is facile, vigorous, grave, in the main correct; but without delicacy or rarity, without splendour or strength of melody; the verse of a man who can write easily, and who is not always too careful to remember that he is writing poetry. Owing, no doubt, partly to the facility with which he wrote, Massinger often has imperfectly accentuated lines, such as:

> They did expect to be chain'd to the oar.

Coleridge has remarked on the very slight degree in which Massinger's verse is distinguished from prose; and no one can read a page of any of his plays without being struck by it. It is not merely that a large proportion of the lines run on and overlap their neighbours; this is only the visible sign of a radical peculiarity. The pitch of Massinger's verse

is somewhat lower than the proper pitch of poetry; somewhat too near the common pitch of prose. Shakespeare, indeed, in his latest period, extended the rhythm of verse to its loosest and freest limits; but not merely did he never pass beyond the invisible and unmistakeable boundary, he retained the true intonation of poetry as completely as in his straitest periods of metrical restraint.

Massinger set himself to follow in the steps of Shakespeare, and he succeeded in catching with admirable skill much of the easy flow and conversational facility at which he aimed. "His English style," says Lamb, "is the purest and most free from violent metaphors and harsh constructions, of any of the dramatists who were his contemporaries." But this "pure and free" style obtains its freedom and purity at a heavy cost; or let us say rather, the style possesses a certain degree of these two qualities because of the absence of certain others. Shakespeare's freest verse is the fullest of episodical beauties and of magical lines. But it is a singular thing, especially singular in a writer distinguished not only by fluency but by dignity and true eloquence, that in the whole

of Massinger's extant works there are scarcely a dozen lines of intrinsic and separable beauty. It would be useless to look in the Massinger part of *The Virgin Martyr* for any such lines as these of Dekker:

> I could weary stars,
> And force the wakeful moon to lose her eyes,
> By my late watching.

It would be equally useless to search from end to end of his plays. Easy flowing lines, vigorous lines, eloquent and persuasive lines, we could find in plenty; but nowhere a line in which colour melts into music, and both become magical. Not quite so difficult, but still very hard indeed, would it be to find any single lines of that rare and weighty sort which may be said to resemble the jar in the *Arabian Nights* into which Solomon had packed the genie. Had Massinger wished to represent Vittoria Accoramboni before her judges, he would have written for her a thoroughly eloquent, admirable, and telling oration; but he could never have wrought her speech into that dagger with which Webster drives home the sharpness of her imperial scorn. That one line of infinite meaning:

> Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle; she died young;

spoken by Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi* over the corpse of his murdered sister, has no parallel in Massinger, who would probably have begun a long and elaborate piece of rhetoric with

> Stay, I feel
> A sudden alteration

If we carry these considerations further, we shall see how fully the mental characteristics of Massinger correspond with the evidences of them in his versification. The ease and facility shown in the handling of metre are manifest equally in the plot and conduct of the plays. Massinger thoroughly understood the art of the playwright. No one perhaps, after Shakespeare, proved himself so constantly capable of constructing an orderly play and working it steadily out. His openings are as a rule admirable; thoroughly effective, explanatory and preparatory. How well, for instance, the first scene of *The Duke of Milan* prepares us, by a certain uneasiness or anxiety of its trembling pitch of happiness, for the events which are to follow! It is not always possible to say as much for his conclusions. Ingenuity, certainly, and considerable con-

structive skill, are there, in a greater or less degree; and in not a few instances (as in that delightful play *The Great Duke of Florence*, or in that powerful play *Believe as You List*) the conclusion is altogether right and satisfying. But in many instances Massinger's very endeavor to wind off his play in the neatest manner, without any tangles or frayed edges, spoils the proper artistic effect. His persistent aversion to a tragic end, even where a virtual tragedy demands it; his invincible determination to make things come to a fortunate conclusion, even if the action has to be huddled up or squashed together in consequence; in a word, his concession to the popular taste, no matter at what cost, not unfrequently distorts the conclusion of plays up to this point well conducted.

Massinger's treatment of character follows in some respects, while it seems in others to contradict, his treatment of versification and of construction. Where Massinger most conclusively fails is in a right understanding and a right representation of human nature; in the power to conceive passion and bring its speech and action vividly and accurately before us.

His theory of human nature is apparently that of the puppet-player: he is aware of violent but not of consistent action, of change but not of development. No dramatist talks so much of virtue and vice, but he has no conception of either except in the abstract; and he finds it not in the least surprising that a virtuous woman should suddenly cry out:

> Chastity,
> Thou only art a name, and I renounce thee!

or that a fanatical Mohammedan should embrace Christianity on being told that the Prophet was a juggler, and taught birds to feed in his ear. His motto might be:

> We are all the balls of time, tossed to and fro;

for his conception of life is that of a game of wild and inconsequent haphazard. It is true that he rewards his good people and punishes the bad with the most scrupulous care; but the good or bad person at the end of a play is not always the good or bad person of the beginning. Massinger's outlook is by no means vague or sceptical on religion[1] or on

[1] *The Renegado* is a treatise on Christian evidence, *The Virgin Martyr* a chronicle of Christian martyrdom, *The Maid of Honour* concludes with a taking of the veil.

morals; he is moralist before all things, and the copy-book tags neatly pinned on to the conclusion of each play are only a somewhat clumsy exhibition of a real conviction and conscientiousness. But his morality is nerveless, and aimless in its general effect; or it translates itself, oddly enough, into a co-partner of confusion, a disturbing and distracting element of mischief.

Notwithstanding all we may say of Massinger's facility, it is evident that we have in him no mere improvisator, or contentedly hasty and superficial person. He was an earnest thinker, a thoughtful politician, a careful observer of the manners and men of his time, and, to the extent of his capacity, an eager student of human nature; but, for all that, his position is that of a foreigner travelling through a country of whose language he knows but a few words or sentences. He observes with keenness, he infers with acumen; but when he proceeds to take the last step, the final touch which transmutes recorded observation into vital fact, he finds (or we, at least, find) that his strength is exhausted, his limit reached. He observes, for instance,

that the characters and motives of men are in general mixed; and especially, and in a special degree, those of men of a certain class, and in certain positions. But when we look at the personages whom he presents before us as mixed characters, we perceive that they are not so in themselves, but are mixed in the making. "We do not forbid an artist in fiction," says Swinburne in speaking of Charles Reade, "to set before us strange instances of inconsistency and eccentricity in conduct; but we do require of the artist that he should make us feel such aberrations to be as clearly inevitable as they are confessedly exceptional." Now this is just what Massinger does not do: it is just here that he comes short of success as a dramatic artist. In Calderon's figure, we see his men dancing to the rhythm of a music which we cannot hear: nothing is visible to us but the grotesque contortions and fantastic motions of the dancer.

Where Massinger fails is in the power of identifying himself with his characters, at least in their moments of profound passion or strenuous action. At his best (or let us say, to be scrupulous, at almost his best) he

succeeds on the one hand in representing the gentler and secondary passions and emotions; on the other, in describing the action of the primary passions very accurately and admirably, but, as it were, in the third person, and from the outside. As Leslie Stephen says with reference to a fine speech of Sir Giles Overreach in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, "Read 'he' for 'I,' and 'his' for 'my,' and it is an admirable bit of denunciation of a character probably intended as a copy from real life." His characters seldom quite speak out; they have almost always about them a sort of rhetorical self-consciousness. The language of pure passion is unknown to them; they can only strive to counterfeit its dialect. In handling a situation of tragic passion, in developing a character subject to the shocks of an antagonistic Fate, Massinger manifests a singular lack of vital force, a singular failure in the realizing imagination. He mistakes extravagance for strength, eloquence for conviction, feverishness for vitality. Take, for instance, the jealousy of Theodosius in *The Emperor of the East*. His conduct and language are altogether unreasoning and unreasonable,

the extravagances of a weak and unballasted nature, depicted by one who can only thus conceive of strong passions. His sudden and overmastering jealousy at sight of the apple given by Eudocia to Paulinus is without probability; and Eudocia's lie when charged with the gift is without reason. It is almost too cruel in this connection to think of Desdemona's handkerchief; of the admirable and inevitable logic of the means by which Othello's mind is not so much imbued with suspicion as convinced with certainty. "All this pother for an apple!" as some sensible person in the play observes. Again, in *The Fatal Dowry*, compare for a moment Malefort's careful bombast, which leaves us cold and incredulous before an impossible and uninteresting monster of wickedness, with the biting and flaming words of Francesco Cenci, before which we shudder as at the fiery breath of the pit. Almost all Massinger's villains, notwithstanding the fearful language which they are in the habit of employing, fail to convince us of their particular wickedness; most of his tried and triumphant heroes fail to convince us of their vitality of virtue. Massinger's conception of

evil is surprisingly naïve: he is frightened, completely taken in, by the big words and blustering looks of these bold and wicked men. He paints them with an inky brush, he tells us how very wicked they are, and he sets them denouncing themselves and their wickedness with a beautiful tenderness of conscience. The blackness of evil and the contrasted whiteness of virtue are alike lost on us, and the good moral with them; for we are unable to believe in the existence of any such beings. It is the same with those exhibitions of tempted virtue of which Massinger is so fond. I do not allude now to cases of actual martyrdom or persecution, such as those of Dorothea or Antiochus; but to situations of a more complex nature, such as that of Mathias with Honoria, or Bertoldo with Aurelia, in which we are expected to see the soul's conflict between virtue enthroned and vice assailant. The fault is that of inadequate realization of the true bearing of the situation; inadequate representation of the conflict which is very properly assumed to be going on. Massinger is like a man who knows that the dial-hand of the clock will describe a certain circle,

passing from point to point to significant figures; but instead of winding up the clock, and setting it going of itself, he can only move round the hand on the outside. To use another figure, his characters oscillate rather than advance, their conversions are without saving effect on their souls, their falls have no damnation. They are alike outside themselves, and they talk of "my lust," "my virtue," as of detached and portable conveniences.

When we drop to a lower level than that of pure tragedy, when we turn to characters who are grave, or mild, or melancholy, or unfortunate, rather than passionate, intense, and flexible, we find that Massinger is more in his element. "Grave and great-hearted," as Swinburne calls him, he could bring before us, with sympathetic skill, characters whose predominant bent is towards a melancholy and great-hearted gravity, a calm and eloquent dignity, a self-sacrificing nobility of service, or lofty endurance of inevitable wrong. Massinger's favourite play was *The Roman Actor*: "I ever held it," he says in his dedication, "the most perfect birth of my Minerva."

It is impossible to say quite that; but it is certainly representative of some among the noble qualities of its writer, while it shows very clearly the defects of these qualities. What it represents is scarcely human nature; but actions and single passions painted for the halls of kings. A certain cold loftiness, noble indeed, but not attained without some freezing of vital heat, informs it. Paris, the actor, is rather a grave and stately shadow than a breathing man; but the idealization is nobly conceived; and both actor and tyrant, Paris and Domitian, are, in their way, impressive figures, made manifest, not concealed, in rhetorical prolusions really appropriate to their time and character. Another classical play, the less-known *Believe as You List*, contains a figure in which I think we have the very best work of which Massinger was capable. The character of the deposed and exiled King Antiochus has a true heroism and kingliness about it; his language, a passionate and haughty dignity. The quiet constancy, the undaunted and uncomplaining endurance of the utmost ills of Fate, which mark the character and the utterance of the

Asian Emperor, raise the poetry of the play to a height but seldom attained by the pedestrian Pegasus of Massinger. As Antiochus is the most impressive of his heroes, so Flaminius is one of the most really human and consistent of his villains. The end of the play is natural, powerful, and significant beyond that of any other; so natural, powerful, and significant, that we may feel quite sure it was received with doubtful satisfaction by the audience above whose head and against whose taste the poet had for once chosen to write.

In one or two striking portraits (those for example of the ironical old courtier Eubulus in *The Picture*, the old soldier Archidamus in *The Bondman*, or the faithful friend Romont in *The Fatal Dowry*) Massinger has shown his appreciation of honest worth and sober fidelity, qualities not of a showy kind, the recognition and representation of which do him honour. In *The Bashful Lover* and *The Maid of Honour* he has represented with special sympathy two phases of reverential and modest love. Hortensio, of the former, is a sort of pale Quixote, a knight-errant a little crazed; very sincere, and a trifle given to uttering

vague and useless professions of hyperbolical humility and devotion. There is a certain febrile nobleness, a showy chivalry, about him; but we are conscious of something "got up" and over-conscious in the exhibition. Adorni, the rejected lover in *The Maid of Honour*, is a truly noble and pathetic picture; altogether without the specious eloquence and petted despair of Hortensio, but thoroughly human and rationally self-sacrificing. His duet with Camiola at the close of the third act is one of the very finest scenes in Massinger's works: that passage where the woman he loves despatches him to the rescue of the man on whom her own heart is set. "You will do this?" she says; and he answers, "Faithfully, madam," and then to himself aside, "but not live long after." A touch of this sort is but too rare in Massinger.

While I am speaking of *The Maid of Honour*, let me refer to the character of Camiola herself: incomparably Massinger's finest portrait of a woman. Camiola ("that small but ravishing substance," as, with a rare and infrequent touch of delicate characterization, she is somewhere called) is notwithstanding a

few flaws in her delineation, a thoroughly delightful and admirable creature; full of bright strength and noble constancy, of womanly heart and most manly spirit and wit. Her bearing in the scene, to a part of which I have alluded, is admirable throughout; not admirable alone, but exquisite, are her quick "Never think more then" to the servant; her outcry about the "petty sum" of the ransom; and especially the words of "perfect moan" which fall from her when she learns the hopeless estate of her lover, imprisoned by his enemy, abandoned by his King:

> Possible! pray you, stand off.
> If I do not mutter treason to myself,
> My heart will break; and yet I will not curse him;
> He is my King. The news you have delivered
> Makes me weary of your company; we'll salute
> When we meet next. I'll bring you to the door.
> Nay, pray you, no more compliments.

When she learns of the treachery of the lover for whom she has done so much, her wondering and sorrowful "O Bertoldo!" is worth a world of rhetoric. It is she who utters the most famous phrase in Massinger, the fearless indictment of the Court doctrine of

the divinity of kings. "With your leave," she says to the King of Sicily,

> With your leave, I must not kneel, sir,
> While I reply to this: but thus rise up
> In my defence, and tell you, as a man,
> (*Since, when you are unjust, the deity,*
> *Which you may challenge as a king, parts from you*)
> 'Twas never read in holy writ, or moral,
> That subjects on their loyalty were obliged
> To love their sovereign's vices.

Her speech in answer to Bertoldo's hollow protestations of penitence, the "Pray you, rise," is full of delicate tact and subtle beauty of spirit.

Unfortunately all Massinger's women are not of the stamp of Camiola. Lidia, indeed, in *The Great Duke of Florence*, is a good, sweet, modest girl; Cleora in *The Bondman* would like to be so; Bellisant in *The Parliament of Love* is a brilliant, dashing creature; Margaret in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* is an emphatically nice, shrewd, pleasant woman; and Matilda in *The Bashful Lover* a commonplace, decent young person, without a thread or shade of distinction. But Massinger's general conception of women, and the greater number of his portraits of them, are

alike debased and detestable. His bad women are incredible monsters of preposterous vice; his good women are brittle and tainted. They breathe the air of courts, and the air is poisoned. Themselves the vilest, they walk through a violent and unnaturally vicious world of depraved imagination, greedy of pleasure and rhetorical of desire. They are shamefacedly shameless; offensive and without passion; importunate and insatiable Potiphar's wives. "Pleasure's their heaven," affirms somebody; and their pleasure is without bit or bridle, without rule or direction. Massinger's favourite situation is that of a queen or princess violently and heedlessly enamoured of a man, apparently of mean estate, though he generally turns out to be a duke in disguise, whom she has never seen five minutes before. Over and over again is this wretched farce gone through; always without passion, sincerity, or strength; always flatly, coldly, ridiculously. I am afraid Massinger thought his Donusas, Corsicas, Domitias, Aurelias, Honorias, and Beaumelles brilliant and fascinating flowers of evil, sisters of Cleopatra and Semiramis, magnificently wicked women. In reality they

never attain to the level of a Delilah. They are vulgar-minded to the core; weak and without stability; mere animals if they are not mere puppets. The stain of sensuality or the smutch of vulgarity is upon even the virtuous. Marcelia, in *The Duke of Milan*, supposed to be a woman of spotless virtue, utters language full of covert licence; for Massinger seems to see virtue in women mainly as a sort of conscious and painful restraint. Eudocia, in *The Emperor of the East*, an injured, innocent wife, betrays an unconscious vulgarity of mind which is enough to withdraw our sympathy from a fairly well-deserving object. The curious thing is, not so much that the same pen could draw Camiola and Corsica, but that the same pen could draw Camiola and Marcelia.

Massinger's main field is the romantic drama. He attempted, indeed, tragedy, comedy, and history; but both tragedy and history assume in his hands a romantic cast, while his two great comedies verge constantly upon tragedy. Of his two most distinct and most distinguished tragedies, *The Duke of Milan* and *The Fatal Dowry*, the former is a powerful and impressive work, rising in parts to his

highest level; the latter, despite its conventional reputation, which it owes partly to Rowe's effective plagiarization in *The Fair Penitent*, a scarcely adequate or satisfactory production. Two or three passages[1] in the latter part of *The Fatal Dowry* have the true accent of nature; but even these are marred by the base alloy with which they are mingled. But *The Duke of Milan*, despite much that is inadequate and even absurd in its handling, rises again and again to something of passion and of insight. The character and the circumstances of Sforza have been often compared with those of Othello: they are still more similar, I should venture to think, to those of Griffith Gaunt; and they have the damning fault of the latter, that the jealousy and its consequences are not made to seem quite inevitable. Sforza is an example, though perhaps the most favourable one, of that inconsequential oscillation of nature to which I have already referred as characteristic of

[1] Found chiefly in the last scene of the fourth act; from "If this be to me, rise," to "That to be merciful should be a sin," and again in the few words following on the death of Beaumelle; with a passage or two in the fifth act.

most of Massinger's prominent characters. But his capacity for sudden and extreme changes of disposition, and his violent and unhinged passion, are represented with more dramatic power, with more force and naturalness, than it is at all usual to find in Massinger; who has here contrived to give a frequent effect of fineness to the frenzies and delusions of his hero. If Sforza is after all but a second-rate Othello, Marcelia is certainly a very shrewish Desdemona, and Francisco a palpably poor Iago.[1]

In tragi-comedy, the romantic drama pure and simple, we may take *The Great Duke of Florence* as the most exquisite example. In this, the most purely delightful play, I think, ever written by Massinger, a play which we read, to use Lamb's expression, "with composure and placid delight," we see the sweetest and most delicate side of Massinger's genius: a country pleasantness and freshness, a masquerading and genial gravity, altogether

[1] There is one touch however, in the temptings of Francisco which is really almost worthy of Iago:

> She's yet guilty
> *Only* in her intent!

charming and attractive. The plot is admirably woven; and how prettily brought about to a happy conclusion, with its good humour, forgiveness, and friendship all around! There is something almost of Shakespeare's charm in people and events; in these princes and courtiers without ceremony and without vice, uttering pretty sentiments prettily, and playing elegantly at life; in these simple lovers, with their dainty, easy trials and crosses on the way to happiness; in the villain who does no real harm, and whom nobody can hate. *The Guardian*, a late play, very fine and flexible in its rhythm, and very brisk in its action, has some exquisite country feeling, together with three or four of the most abominable characters and much of the vilest language in Massinger. One character at least, Darazzo, the male of Juliet's nurse, is really, though offensive enough in all conscience, very heartily and graphically depicted. *A Very Woman*, again, by Massinger and Fletcher,[1] has much that is pleasant and delightful; some of it full of sweetness, with

[1] Fletcher's slave-market scene in Act III is a piece of admirable merriment; singularly realistic and inventive.

some that is rank enough. I have spoken already of *The Maid of Honour*, or it might be mentioned here as a play uniting (somewhat as in *Measure for Measure*, which it partly resembles) the lighter and graver qualities of tragedy and comedy under the form of the romantic drama.

Massinger's lack of humour did not prevent him from writing comedy, nor yet from achieving signal success in it. *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* is the most memorable of his plays; but, though it is styled a comedy, it is certainly not for laughter that we turn to it. *A New Way* and *The City Madam* belong to the Comedy of Manners; satirical transcript of contemporary life, somewhat after the style of Terence or Plautus. All Massinger's plays are distinguished by an earnest and corrective tone on contemporary politics and current fashions; and it is no wonder that he succeeded in a species of play devoted wholly to the exhibition and satirization of the follies and vanities of the day. His constant touch on manners, even in romantic plays with classical or eastern localities, is peculiar, and suggests a certain pre-occupation with the

subject, possibly due to early associations at Wilton House, possibly to mere personal bent or circumstances. Remembering the letter of 1624, we may be allowed to fancy a personal applicability in the frequent denunciations of usurers and delineations of the misery of poor debtors. But besides that, I think that Massinger, having no force to enter into the deep and secret chambers of the soul, found his place to be in a censorship of society, and was right in concerning himself with what he could do so well. His professedly comic types, even Justice Greedy, are mere exaggerations, solitary traits frozen into the semblance of men, without really comic effect. But in the conduct of these two plays, in the episodical illuminations of London and provincial life, in the wealth of observation and satire which they exhibit, Massinger has left us work of permanent value; and in the character of Sir Giles Overreach he has made his single contribution to the gallery of permanent illustrations of human nature: a portrait to be spoken of with Grandet and with Harpagon.

Massinger is the product of his period, and he reflects faithfully the temper of court and

society under the first Charles. Much that we have to regret in him was due to the misfortune of his coming just when he did, at the ebb of a spent wave; but the best that he had was all his own. Serious, a thinker, a moralist, gifted with an instinct for nobility and a sympathy in whatever is generous and self-sacrificing, a practical student of history, and an honest satirist of social abuses, he was at the same time an admirable story-teller, and a master of dramatic construction. But his grave and varied genius was lacking in the primary requirements of the dramatist: in imagination, in strength, in sincerity. He has no real mastery over the passions, and his eloquence does not appeal to the heart. He interests us strongly; but he does not convince us in spite of ourselves. The whole man is seen in the portrait by which we know him: in the contrast and contradiction of that singular face, which interests, to some degree attracts, yet never satisfies us, with its melancholy and thoughtful grace, marred by a certain vague weakness and a scarcely definable sense of something lacking.

1887.

XII. JOHN DAY

John Day, "sometime Student of Caius College, Cambridge," a "base fellow" and a "rogue" according to Ben Jonson, a good man and a charming writer if the evidence of his own plays may be credited, seems to have come down to posterity in the person of his best work, and of little beside his best. When he began to write for the stage is not known,—before 1593, some have supposed—but we learn from Henslowe's Diary that in the six years from 1598 to 1603 he had a whole or part share in as many as twenty-two plays, only one of which, *The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green*, has come down to us. These plays were: in 1598, *The Conquest of Brute, with the first finding of the Bath* (Day, assisted by Chettle); in 1599, *The Tragedy of Merry* and *The Tragedy of Cox of Collumpton* (with *Haughton*), *The Orphan's Tragedy* (with Haughton and Chettle); in 1600, unassisted, *The Italian Tragedy of* . . . [name wanting in

the Diary], *The Spanish Moor's Tragedy* and *The Seven Wise Masters* (with Dekker and Haughton), *The Golden Ass, and Cupid and Psyche* (with Dekker and Chettle), *The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green* (with Chettle); in 1601, *The Second Part of the Blind Beggar*, and *The Third Part* (also with Chettle), *The Conquest of the West Indies* (with Haughton and Wentworth Smith), *The Six Yeomen of the West, Friar Rush and the Proud Women of Antwerp*, and *The Second Part of Tom Dough* (all three with Haughton); in 1602, unassisted, *The Bristol Tragedy; Merry as may be, The Black Dog of Newgate, The Second Part of the Black Dog, The Unfortunate General* (all with Hathway and Wentworth Smith), and *The Boast of Billingsgate* (with Hathway and others); in 1603 or earlier, *Jane Shore* (with Chettle). In 1610, we learn from the Stationers' Register, Day wrote a play called *The Mad Pranks of Merry Moll of the Bankside;* in 1619, with Dekker, *The Life and Death of Guy of Warwick;* again with Dekker, in or before 1623, a "French tragedy" of *The Bellman of Paris;* and in 1623, a comedy, *Come see a Wonder.* Of extant plays, *The*

Isle of Gulls was published in 1606; *The Travels of the Three English Brothers, Sir Thomas, Sir Anthony, Mr. Robert Shirley* (written in conjunction with Rowley and Wilkins), in 1607; *Law-Tricks, or Who would have thought it,* and *Humour out of Breath,* in 1608; *The Parliament of Bees,* in 1641; and *The Blind Beggar* in 1659. There is also extant in the British Museum (Sloane MS. 3150) an allegorical prose tract entitled *Peregrinatio Scholastica,* first published in Mr. Bullen's collected edition of Day's works in 1881; a begging acrostic on the name of Thomas Dowton, an actor; an undated letter of Day from which we learn of a poem on *The Miracles of Christ;* a few autograph lines belonging to some lost historical play: "the rest is silence."

It is not a pleasant thought that a writer of such dainty and select genius as the author of *The Parliament of Bees* should have had to labour so hard, on such unworthy material, for so unthankworthy a public as that which left him to borrow of Henslowe two shillings, or it may be five shillings—"in Redy money," as the record quaintly states. That the main part at least of these lost plays was but

journeyman's work, work sufficient to the day and the evil thereof, seems evident from the mere titles, a small proportion no doubt of the whole, that have come down to us. Even Mr. Bullen finds it impossible to regret the loss; and he would be content to spare the *Three English Brothers* and the *Blind Beggar* as well. The fact is, Day's range is exceptionally limited, and outside his circle he has no magic.

In turning over the pages of Lamb's *Specimens*, it is with something of relief, after so much that is bloody and gloomy, that we come on the two or three brief extracts from *The Parliament of Bees*, by which alone, for so long a space of time, the name of John Day was known to English readers. They are so light and bright, so delicate in the wording and phrasing, so aloof and apart from the commonness of everyday doings, or the sombre action of that little world of the Elizabethan drama. The choicest of Day's work comes with just such a sense of relief to the student who has traversed that country widely. It is a wayside rest, a noontide hour in the cool shadow of the woods. There is something so

pleasant about the work, that we find ourselves pardoning its faults and overlooking its shortcomings, almost without thinking about them. Day—it is clear if we really consider the matter—has but a very slight insight into human nature, only a very faint power of touching or moving us, no power whatever to mould a coherent figure or paint a full-length portrait; as to plot, he is content with none at all, as in the *Bees*, or, as in the other three comedies, the plot is of such fantastic and intricate slightness, a very spider's-web of filmy threads, that it is not to be grasped without coming to pieces. His wit is a clear flame, but thin and only intermittent. Day's natural gift in that way is not so rich that it can stand a long draw on its exchequer. The good money becomes used up, and then, instead of putting up the shutters, the bank passes bad currency. All these are serious faults; they are leaks enough to sink a weightier reputation; but, somehow, they do no more than temper our delight in Day. The world of his fancy is not the world of our common sunlight; and life is lived otherwise, and men and women are some-

what other than the men and women of our knowledge, there. It is a land into which the laws of logic can scarcely come; a land where gentle and petulant figures come and go like figures in a masque, aimlessly enough, yet to measure, always with happy effect, threading the forest paths as we see ourselves in dreams, dreams sleeping or waking, ever on the heels of some pleasing or exciting adventure. The conversation, whenever it is good, is carried on in jests, or in flights of lyrical fancy, somewhat as in Shakespeare's early comedies, somewhat with a sort of foretaste of the comedies of Congreve. If it is not the talk of real life, it is at least a select rendering of our talk at its brightest and freest, when black care is away, and the brain is quickened and the tongue loosened by some happy chance, among responsive friends in tune with a blithe mood. It is how we should often *like* to talk; and that accord with our likings of things, as apart from our consciousness, not always pleasant, of them, is the secret of a certain harmony we seem to feel in those parts of Day's comedies which are least like life. He steps quite through the

ugly surface of things, freeing us, as we take the step with him, of all the disabilities of our never quite satisfied existence.

This land of fancy to which Day leads us, is essentially quite as much a land of fancy in the comedies which profess to chronicle the doings of men and women, as in the comedy whose dramatis personæ are all bees. In *The Isle of Gulls*, *Law-Tricks* and *Humour out of Breath*, equally as to the spirit, very differently as regards the point of execution, Day has painted life as it pleased him to see it—in a delightful confusion, made up of entanglements, disguises, jests, sudden adventures, good-hearted merriment, a comedy within a comedy. Compared with *Humour out of Breath*, the two other plays have a certain coarseness of texture—comparative only, let it be understood; the action is not so pleasant, nor the wit so spontaneous. They are immensely lively, always entertaining, ravelled up with incomparable agility, full of business, wit and humour; breaking every now and then into seriousness, and, in the later play particularly, blossoming out quite unexpectedly into a tender and lyrical pathos; as in that

scene where the forsaken countess talks with such sweet sadness to her maids as they sit at their sewing—a little passage of pure exquisiteness, reminding one, as now and again Day will remind us, of certain of the loveliest bits of Shakespeare. In another single scene in *The Isle of Gulls*, the tennis-court scene, we find a quite typical example of Day's special variety of wit, thin and captious indeed, but swift in its interchange of strokes as the tennis-balls, flying to and fro, with sharp and harmless knocks, in repartees deftly delivered and straight to their aim. It is in *Humour out of Breath*, however,—so suggestively named, and so truly, for the little play keeps us breathless at the heels of its breathless actors—here, rather than anywhere else outside *The Parliament of Bees*, that the special note of Day's cheerful genius is heard most clearly. It has his finest polish, the cream of his wit, the pick of his women. Day's women are singularly charming: they are all of one type, and that no very subtle one, but they are immensely likable, and in this play we have the very best of them,—Florimel, Emilia's sister, Hippolyta's and

Violetta's, but the most beautiful and brilliant of her sisters. Emilia, in *Law-Tricks*, reminds us, by anticipation, of Millimant; as Miso, in *The Isle of Gulls*, with her "As I am a Lady," seems almost like a faint foreshadowing of the most tragic figure on the English Comic stage, Lady Wishfort. But Florimel, calling up no associations of Congreve or any other, proves the most delightful of companions. She, like her sisters, is a creature of moods, bright, witty, full of high spirits, very free-spoken, but less free in action than in speech; a thoroughly English girl, perhaps the ideal of our favourite mettlesome breed. You can see her lips and eyes in a smile, flashing as her saucy words; and she is good-hearted, capable of strength in love. Here, as so often elsewhere, Day's instinctive sympathy with whatever is honest, lovely and of good report, shows itself in unthought-of touches. He cannot conceive a villain; his fantastic figures and the fantasy of his action have alike a basis of honesty and rectitude, never intrusive, scarcely visible perhaps, often, but there if we choose to look for it. Just this quality, going out into very homely material, gives to

the hasty, irregular, rough and romping play of *The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green* a saving grace, and not of morals, but of art; for it is a touch of nature. Touches of nature there are, but of another kind, in *Humour out of Breath;* always, however sincere, however serious, with an after-thought or atmosphere of brightness in or about them: as in Aspero's wooing of Florimel, passing out of jests and quibbles into hearty earnest, earnest from the first perhaps on both sides, though the lady has a dancing wit, and the gentleman goads a sober tongue to curvets. How pretty a touch of nature is this: "I cannot live without him!" cries Florimel, when her saucy petulance has driven away her lover. "O that he knew it, lady," suggests the quick-witted little page, at fault for once in a lover's moods; for, "He does," returns Florimel, never at fault; "he would never have left me else. He does!" Touches of this sort, true to nature in the more intimate and subtle sense, are not common in Day; he is not wont to reveal anything new to us in our own hearts, or to go often below the surface. It would be unfair to lay this to his charge, for he does not profess

to give us more than we find in him. "Humour out of breath," a world where wit is the all in all—this is what he gives us; a world, how delightful to contemplate, where men and women are so careful of their jests, and the measure and harmony of this absorbing play-business, that they will even (as Polymeter says on some occasion, in another play) "leave at a jest," and turn the conversation after a period of punning.

I have said that the scene of these three comedies is virtually a land of fancy; in *The Parliament of Bees* it is not only virtually but formally so. No instinct could have been happier than that which led Day—could it have been with any thought of Aristophanes? —to turn the "men and women fashioned by his fancy" into bees, and give them a whole play to themselves. That this was an afterthought, only come upon after a large part of what now forms the play was written, seems evident; for, as Mr. Bullen has pointed out, "with the exception of characters 1, 11, and 12, which were plainly written for the occasion, the masque seems to have been made up of scenes, more or less revised, contributed

to [Dekker's] *Wonder of a Kingdom*, [Samuel Rowley's] *Spanish Soldier*, and other plays that have either been lost or where the connection remains yet to be pointed out." There is not even an attempt at anything like a plot; what we have is a sequence of scenes, sketching, and lightly satirising, the "humours" of the age under this queer disguise of the bees. It is doubtful whether Day ever intended it, but in this fantastic masque of his there are all the elements of an heroically comic picture of life; life seen from the point of view of an outside observer, in all its eager stir and passion, so petty and so vain if one could look down on it from above—in all its strenuous littlenesses, its frail strength, its gigantic self-delusions; petty, all of it, to the Gods, as these tiny creatures, with their insect life of a summer, seem to men. Here is the quack, the braggart, the spendthrift, each with all the passions of a man—and just as long as your nail! But if this view enters at all into Day's scheme, it is suffered to add no bitterness, no touch of spleen, to this sweet and gracious little play, revised, as we know from an earlier manuscript still existing, with such

a tender care, not only for the clear polish of the lines, but equally for the pleasant wholesomeness of the story, the honesty and fair fame of the little personages. Quite the best scene, the sixth, between Arethusa and Ulania concerning Meletus, has gained the most from this revision: it is free now from any speck, and is one of the loveliest pastorals in our language, a little masterpiece of dainty invention, honey-hearted and without a sting; touching at one point, in the last speech of the poor neglected bee, the last limits of Day's capacity for pensive and tender pathos. Nothing in the play is so bee-like, nothing so human, as this all-golden episode; though in pastoral loveliness it is touched, I think, by the wood-notes of the final octosyllabics—verses of exquisite inappropriateness for bees, but with all the smell and freshness of the country in them, a pageant of the delightful things of nature and husbandry, written in rhymes that gambol in pairs like lambs or kids in spring.

Without *The Parliament of Bees* we should never have known what Day was capable of. The wit and invention of his comedies of adventure make up, it is true, a very distant

and a very important part of his claim on the attention of posterity; but these comedies, after all, are very largely written, especially in the best parts of them, in prose, and it is as a poetical craftsman that Day is most himself and most perfect. Such a line as this:

> Who then shall reap the golden crop you sow?

bears the very sign and seal of Day. Or, again:

> The windows of my hive, with blossoms dight,
> Are porters to let in our comfort, light.

Our comfort, light—the very cadence of these beautiful words rings of Day, and the meaning equally with the sound. His peculiar vein of fancy comes out typically in those lines where the Plush Bee longs, like Alexander, for "ten worlds"—indeed to sell, but to sell "*for Alpine hills of silver*," so prettily extravagant, so new and unthought-of a phrase. Familiar and quite ordinary ideas, commonplace thoughts, take in his mind an aspect which gives them all the charm of a pleasing novelty—a fanciful aspect, very fresh and

pleasant, the good cheer of fancy. There is often an airy spring in his moods, lifting his honest commonplaces quite off the ground; transforming them, as frost transforms and transfigures the bare branches of the trees. The very sound of his rhymes is a delight in itself, as in those lines which tell how

> of the sudden, listening, you shall hear
> A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring
> Actæon to Diana in the spring.

Instinctive harmony—a sense of delicate music in the fall and arrangement of quite common words, entirely without factitious aid, as of undue alliteration, or the smallest sacrifice of matter to metre—this is his gift; and it is without any appearance of effort that verse flows after beautiful verse, so easy does it seem for him to "add to golden numbers golden numbers." Easy or not, we know it was not without labour that this play of his became what it is. Day was no trifler, slight, airy, fantastically delicate as his work may be; it was not a trifler, a workman careless of the things of art ,who wrote these lines:

> The true Poet indeed doth scorn to gild
> A coward's tomb with glories, or to build

> A sumptuous pyramid of golden verse
> Over the ruins of an ignoble hearse.
> *His lines like his inventions are born free,*
> *And both live blameless to eternity:*
> He holds his reputation so dear
> As neither flattering hope nor servile fear
> Can bribe his pen to temporize with kings:
> The blacker are their crimes, he louder sings.

The writer of these splendid lines was no "base fellow" such as Ben Jonson's hasty spleen would have dubbed him, but a poet with an instinctive sense of melody which Jonson never possessed, and an ideal of art as lofty as Jonson's own. His work has no conquering force, no massive energy, no superabundance of life; these qualities we can get elsewhere, but nowhere save in Day that special charm of fancy and wit and bright invention, "golden murmurs from a golden hive," for which, if there is any saving grace in these things, we can suppose his name will live a little longer yet.

1888.

XIII. MIDDLETON AND ROWLEY

Thomas Middleton is thought to have been born in London about 1570; he died there, and was buried at Newington Butts on 4 July, 1627. All that we know about him is that he married a daughter of one of the six clerks in chancery, and had a son in 1604; that he was city chronologer from 1620 till the time of his death, when he was succeeded by Ben Jonson; that, in 1624, he was summoned before the privy council, with the actors who had played in his *Game of Chess*, and, it appears, put in prison at the instigation of Godomar, the Spanish ambassador; and that, in 1619, Ben Jonson spoke of him to Drummond of Hawthornden as "a base fellow." This hard saying may, after all, have been meant as no more than a literary criticism. The words are: "that Markham (who added his English Arcadia) was not of the number of the Faithful, *i.e.*, *Poets*, and but a base fellow. That such were Day and Middleton.'

This might mean no more than that, to Johnson, Middleton's art or verse seemed "base," in the sense of pedestrian, or going on a low level. Nothing more was said about him by anyone of consequence, except a passing word from Scott, until the time of Lamb's *Specimens of English Dramatic Poetry* in 1808. Lamb gave copious and carefully-chosen extracts from his plays, and said almost all the essential things about him; Leigh Hunt followed, picking up the one grain left over by Lamb; and, in 1860, Dyce brought out a complete edition of the plays, which was re-edited and extended by Bullen in 1885. Of William Rowley, there has never been any edition, and we know even less of him than of Middleton. He is conjectured to have been born about 1585 and to have died some time after 1637, the year of his marriage. He was an actor in various companies, and is supposed to have revised plays for new performances. For the most part, he collaborated with other playwrights, especially with Middleton; and the finest work of both Middleton and Rowley is done in this collaboration. His chief play, *All's Lost by Lust*, has never been

reprinted from the scarce original edition of 1633. Besides the plays, he published, in 1609, *A Search for Money; or, the Lamentable Complaint for the Loss of the Wandering Knight, Monsieur L'Argent*, a pamphlet in the manner of the time, full of crude realistic satire, written in his abrupt, lean and downright prose.

The earliest work attributed to Middleton is an endless composition in six-line stanzas called *The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased*, published in 1597. The dedication to Lord Devereaux, and an address, wanting in some copies, "to the Gentlemen-Readers," are both signed Thomas Middleton, and we can but hope that it was someone else of the same name. Addressing the critics, as Momus and Zoilus, the writer regrets, not quite truthfully, "I lack a scarecrow," and bids them "if you gape for stuffing, hie you to dead carrion carcases, and make them your ordinaries." But no better fare is provided, and a sufficient scarecrow has been set up over this unploughed field by every subsequent editor. The task, if he really endured it, must have effectually cured Middleton of any further inclination for preaching.

"O weak capacity of strongest wit!" he laments, and with justice; yet, two years afterwards, seems to have attempted satire with no less futility than sermonising. *Micro-cynicon. Sixe Snarling Satyres,* published in 1599, has been attributed to Middleton for no more certain reason than the signature "T. M. Gent" which follows the introductory *Defiance to Envy* with which the writer, in imitation of Hall, introduces his first and only book of satires. They are weakly imitated from Marston.

> My pen's two nebs shall turn into a fork,
> Chasing old Envy from so young a work,

the writer threatens; but the threat could not possibly have been needed. The "snarling Muse now thundering rhyme" so feebly must have been beyond the reach of envy, and is now too insignificant to need identification. But Middleton was an unequal writer, and it is impossible to discredit even such bad work as being unlikely because unworthy to have been written by him.

His mark is much more distinctly to be traced in two pamphlets published in 1604,

and signed T. M. in their epistles to the reader. The less interesting of them is *Father Hubburd's Tales*, which contains a good deal of indifferent verse, no better than Middleton's lyric verse usually is. Its main interest for us is in the very kindly and regretful praise of Nashe, whom he calls "honest soul," "too slothful to thyself," "cut off in thy best blooming May":

> Drones eat thy honey: thou wast the true bee.

The tract is one of the allegorising satires of the time, written in a slow narrative style, with abundant detail of the manners and fashions censured, and a good deal of quite sober realism in the descriptions and incidents. *The Black Book* is more extravagant and more pungent, and is like a sample of the raw material, presented to us by the playwright in his first self-conscious pose as moralist. He parades as one "diving into the deep of this cunning age" and bringing to light "the infectious bulks of craft, cozenage, and panderism, the three bloodhounds of a commonwealth." And he professes that his lively exposures are meant for the warning and

confirming of the "truly virtuous," and commends himself for "the modesty of my phrases, that even blush when they discover vices and unmask the world's shadowed villanies." The tale is put into the mouth of Lucifer, who speaks his own prologue in a vigorous piece of blank verse and rime, by way of response to Nashe's dedication of *Pierce Pennilesse* to "the high and mightie Prince of darknesse, Donsell dell Lucifer, King of Acheron, Stix and Phlegeton, Duke of Tartary, Marquesse of Cocytus, and Lord high Regent of Lymbo." The pamphlet is done in Nashe's manner, and shows no less knowledge of its subject. It describes what may well have been Nashe's death-bed, seen by "the sullen blaze of a melancholy lamp that burnt very tragically upon the narrow desk of a half-bedstead, which descried all the pitiful ruins throughout the whole chamber." It shows glimpses of "your twelve tribes of villany," at much the same machinations as in the plays; and the devil, having gone to and fro in London, "to gorge every vice full of poison," sits down to make out his last will and testament, leaving legacies "like ratsbane, to poison the realm," in a catalogue

of the more profitable of the vices. We see Middleton, for all his drawing of a moral, very interestedly at home in the details of all that he denounces; preparing himself, deliberately or not, for his work as a writer of dramatic comedy.

It is quite possible that *The Mayor of Queenborough*, which was printed with Middleton's name in 1661, is the earliest play of his that we have; and quite possible that we have it only in a revised state. Such merit as there is in the play lies almost wholly in individual lines and passages, which stand out from a confused and rather hideous mingle of tragic bombast and strained farce. The dumb-show and choruses between the acts are not less immature than the horrors in action by which we can imagine Middleton to be trying to force himself to be tragic. I can see no trace of Rowley anywhere in the play, least of all in the comic scenes, which have distinct traces of the manner of Middleton. The whole play seems to me the premature attempt of a man, not naturally equipped for tragic or romantic writing, to do the tragic comedy then in fashion; and his attempt was probably

continued in the plays, now lost, at which we know Middleton was working in 1602: *Caesar's Fall*, with Munday, Drayton, and Webster; *The Two Harpies*, with the same and Dekker; and *The Chester Tragedy*. In *Blurt, Master Constable*, which belongs to the same year and is the first of his published plays, we see him recovering himself after this false start, and setting off spiritedly on the comedies of intrigue which were to form the first division of his work. The prose has become alive, and swift of foot; the dialogue slips easily from prose into verse and back again; the action, and these unchastened tongues, gallop. Middleton has found a subject-matter and a technique; and to these he will be almost wholly faithful for the long first half of his career, the fifteen years of comedy.

That is, unless we are to believe, on the strength of a dubious allusion, that Middleton, before writing *The Mayor of Queenborough*, wrote *The Old Land*, or part of it, and that Massinger and Rowley, who would both have been too young to have collaborated with him at the time, added large portions later. Of Massinger, there is no trace in the play,

but of Rowley the traces are unmistakable, not so much in the actual writing of the comic parts as in the whole conception of the main scenes and characters. The play is in a sense the preparation for *A Fair Quarrel* of 1617, in which both wrote together, and it seems to mark the beginning of the collaboration, and of that new influence which came into Middleton's work with Rowley. It is in these two plays that we find, for the first time, that "exquisiteness of moral sensibility" which Lamb divined in one and that "delicacy of perception in matters of right and wrong" which he distinguished in the other.

From 1602, the date of *Blurt, Master Constable*, to 1617, the date of *A Fair Quarrel*, almost the whole of Middleton's work is in farcical comedy, at once realistic and satirical. It is to the early part of this period that a play is generally attributed whose authorship no one would have troubled to enquire into if it had not been published as "written by W. S." *The Puritan* is still printed among what are called the "doubtful plays" of Shakespeare. When Swinburne says that it is "much more like Rowley's than like Middle-

ton's worst work" he is, I think, strictly true, but is not to be taken to mean that Rowley wrote it. There is nothing sufficiently individual in the play to give so much as a solid starting-point for conjecture. Compare it with the worst of Middleton's comedies, *The Family of Love*, and in that tedious satire there is at least some intention, though that intention is now mainly lost to us; it is the realist's attempt to show up the dulness of dull people by making them speak and act no more nimbly than was natural to them. The parody there is, apparently, so close that we can mistake it for the original. But the diction, though creeping, is not ignoble; it is like the fumbling of a man on an instrument which he is on the way to master. The fumbler of *The Puritan* will get no further.

In 1604 Middleton had some share in *The Honest Whore* of Dekker, but no very considerable one, so far as his manner can be traced there, and, seven years later, we find him collaborating again with Dekker in *The Roaring Girl*, though here, also, what is finest in the play seems to be Dekker's. Apart from these two divergences, and an occasional masque

or pageant, done to order, his course is direct, and his main concern, as he defines it later, in commending *The World tost at Tennis* to the reader and understander, is to be "neither too bitterly taxing, nor too soothingly telling, the world's broad abuses." In a prefatory address to the "comic play-readers" of *The Roaring Girl*, he is still more explicit. "The fashion," he says,

> of play-making I can properly compare to nothing so naturally as the alteration in apparel; for in the time of the great crop-doublet, your huge bombasted plays, quilted with mighty words to lean purpose, was only then in fashion: and as the doublet fell, neater inventions began to set up. Now, in the time of spruceness, our plays follow the niceness of our garments; single plots, quaint conceits, lecherous jests, drest up in hanging sleeves: and those are fit for the times and the termers. Such a kind of light-colour summer stuff, mingled with divers colours, you shall find this published comedy.

The early comedy of Middleton is as light, rancid, and entertaining as anything in the Elizabethan drama. It is irresponsible rather than immoral, and does not exactly recommend or approve of the trickeries and debaucheries which it represents in a life-like way, under such improbable conditions. Yet

the writer is no more careful of his ethical than of his other probabilities, and takes little trouble to keep up any consistency in the minds or morals of his agile puppets. His aim is at effect, and he rarely fails in his aim. Even when we do not believe in the persons, and do not care about the upshot of the action, we are almost constantly enlivened, and, willingly, or unwillingly, carried along. Middleton allows us to hate or despise, but not to disregard him.

The main material of his comedy is in the acts and moods of the human animal. Sex dominates the whole Elizabethan drama, but here it is not a terror, a fascination, or a sin, but an occupation. A passage in *The Phoenix* might be applied to almost any of these plays:

> What monstrous days are these!
> Not only to be vicious most men study,
> But in it to be ugly; strive to exceed
> Each other in the most deformed deed.

Is it a merit in Middleton that he shows us vice always as an ugly thing, even when he seems to take pleasure in it, and to forget to condemn it? The "beggarly fools and swarming knaves," to use a phrase of his own, who

traffick in souls, bodies, and possessions throughout these travesties, confusions and "familiar accidents which happen in town," are set a-gog by no moralist, but by so keen and unprejudiced an observer of the human comedy that, for the most part, they come out in their naked colours, almost against his intention. And, as he lets vice peep through all cloaks and stand self-condemned, so he shows us a certain hardly-conscious "soul of goodness in things evil." There is true and good human feeling in some of the most shameless scenes of *Your Five Gallants*, where a whole lost and despised world of "strange devils and pretty damnable affections" is stirred up into plausible action. They take place where there is "violet air, curious garden, quaint walks, fantastical arbours, three back-doors, and a coach-gate," in a "music-school" or "Maison Tellier" of the period, and the very names of the characters are hardly quotable. The humanity is accidental, and comes from absolute knowledge of a world where "every part shoots up daily into new subtlety; the very spider weaves her cauls with more art and cunning to entrap the fly." Middleton,

though the spider preoccupies him, and lends him a web for spinning, puts the fly too into the pattern.

If we seek a reason for the almost universal choice of brothels and taverns as the scenes of Elizabethan comedy, we shall find it partly in a theory, accepted from the Latin and Italian drama, that this was the proper province of the comic muse. The accidents of a player's or professional writer's life gave opportunities for knowledge of just that world into which he was naturally thrust. The Elizabethan audience was accustomed from the first to the two extremes of novel tragedy and brutal comedy. That violent contrast appealed to a taste always hungering and thirsting for strong meat and strong drink. The puritan limits had not yet fixed themselves; they were but divined as a thing one could be aware of and mock at. At the same time, the stage was not exactly respected; it had no character to keep up. Thus, the dramatist, being as free as the modern French caricaturist to make his appeal in the most direct way, to the animal through the animal, had no hesitation in using the gross material at hand

grossly. In the more serious men, we get no more than painful attempts to please a taste which Middleton must have found it easy to gratify. He was no dreamer, he was not a poet in the instinctive irrepressible sense in which Dekker, for instance, was a poet, and he shared a love which was common to Dekker and to others at that time, for mean adventures of loose people in cities, knaves who gulled and fools who were gulled, sharpers, highwaymen, and, outside cities, gipsies. His eyes were open upon every folly of fashion or freak of religion; he knew his law and his lawyers, and he saw their capacities for entertainment; he had all the terms of cant and astrology at his finger's ends, and realised the savour of the oddities of popular speech. It was easy to him to set these people talking as they would really talk, or with just that heightening which his sense of pungent and appropriate words gave him; and he could set scene after scene galloping across the stage, not taking more trouble than his public demanded in making his plots consistent or probable, so long as they went at full speed along familiar ways; not caring, most of the time, to create individ-

ual characters, but relying upon the effect of vividly realised moods, of people very much alive for a given moment. A character so ripely developed as Sir Bounteous Progress in *A Mad World, my Masters* is rare among these nimble types and instances of fixed follies or ascertained "humours."

What we remember Middleton's comedies for is not their separate characters but their brace of gallants, their "school" of wantons, their clash of cozener with cozener, their ingenuities of deceit, the "heat of fury" of their entangled action. We remember single scenes, of a marvellous and sometimes cruelly comic reality, like the death-bed of Dampit the drunkard in *A Trick to catch the Old One*, or that other death-scene in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, where an old sinner makes his last end in grotesque and frightened repentance, while the man and woman whom he may be supposed to have most wronged remember the fact for the first time as they foresee the cutting short of their shameful revenue. Here, as often in Middleton, irony comes out of the mere faithfulness with which he sets before us exactly what would happen at such a moment

as that. His plays are full of these paradoxes of event, which it is the custom to call unpleasant, and which, sometimes, certainly are unpleasant when the playwright seems to be unaware that some hideous piece of villany is being set to rights (so far as relative justice is concerned) by a trick of virtue not less unpardonable.

If Bullen is right in his conjecture that *The Widow* (a play published in 1652 as a "lively piece, drawn by the art of Jonson, Fletcher, and Middleton") belongs to about this date, revised later, it would, for Middleton, be curiously innocent in the midst of all its vivid banter and thieves' foolery. In how many plays of this period could the characters say to one another at the close, without irony, "Be good" and "Be honest," as two of the characters do here? Jonson is for nothing in it, unless as a passing influence; but I do not see why Fletcher might not have been the reviser, as well as the writer of one or two of the songs. But the main part, unmistakably, is Middleton's, and it is, perhaps, in this play that the romantic element first shows itself among the incidents and actualities of knavery.

It took Middleton a long time to realise that there was such a thing as honour, even in transactions which he felt it his business to watch from the knaves' point of view, because that was the one which would best entertain his audience. He chose stories, persons and surroundings for their immediate stage effect, making them as real and amusing as he could, scene by scene; and it was so rarely that it occurred to him to temper the trickeries of his plots by some honest motive that we find him confusing moral values without due indication of being aware of it. There is no doubt that he wrote hastily, and with ease, and a man who writes hastily and with ease for the stage will readily sacrifice a point of conscience to a theatrical solution. Once, in *The Roaring Girl*, some frank and convincing honesty comes into the bad company, and has the best of it there. But how much of Middleton is to be found in what gives a pleasant quality to that one play, not less astir than the others with his usual crew and company?

Though the work of each overlaps occasionally, there can be little doubt of the main shares of Middleton and Dekker in *The Roaring Girl*.

It is, undoubtedly, Dekker who has created, and mainly set in action, the good honest hoyden who masquerades through the play in the name of Moll Cutpurse, a creature of another colour, if we can believe contemporary records. "Worse things I must needs confess," says Middleton in his preface "to the comic play-readers," "the world has taxed her for than has been written of her; but 'tis the excellency of a writer to leave things better than they are." To paint a woman who asks justly,

> must you have
> A black ill name because ill things you know?

and to show her talking thieves' slang among thieves with an easy familiarity, and yet going through this evil company like a knight-errant, helping honest lovers and pulling down knaves, was a task more within the power of Dekker than of Middleton, whose metre and manner come and go with the gallipots and rattling roguish shop-keepers who cry their wares and complicate their private doings through the whole underplot of the play. But little of the really significant speech of

Moll can be attributed to Middleton, and, though much of the business and movement of the play is his, and much of the "manners," Dekker, too, is responsible for the fifth act with its almost too liberal local colour of "canting." The play is untidy, but very much alive; and Dekker seems to bring fresh air into musty rooms, not only by the presence of this vital woman, not to be paralleled elsewhere in Middleton's comedies, but by a way of writing which is more a poet's way than his. The very sound of the lines has a lilt and spring in them, as in a casual image of this kind:

> my thoughts must run,
> As a horse runs that's blind, round in a mill,
> Out every step, yet keeping one path still.

Middleton's verse, for all its sinews, could not have given just that turn to a line; and Dekker brings with him that beauty which was always a natural accident in his speech.

The prose of Middleton, as we see it in the comedies, used more often than verse, but dropping easily into and out of verse, is a pungent, fluent, very natural and speakable prose. It has lightness, and yet is not empty, is often

witty without going unduly beyond the probabilities of talk; only at times, as in *The Family of Love*, does it become pedantic; and it rarely loses a certain deftness even when it drops into beastliness. Touches of the edged speech of the period, which shines and strikes, are not wanting. "Bright Helena of this house, would thy Troy were a-fire, for I am a-cold," says someone, on no particular occasion. The prose goes at a great rate, and carries you with it, while you travel slowly with Rowley, as often as he takes Middleton's place. And the verse is hardly less swift, galloping often on more feet than the measure demands, but rarely jarring the measure. In some of the plays, Middleton takes no care to modulate from prose into verse, but jumps forward and backward with little need, barely lifting the verse above the measure of the prose. Gradually the quality and adaptability of the verse improve; developing directly out of the prose it becomes not less flexible. And we find him cultivating with increasing skill what had always been a homely colloquial tendency, dealing in culinary and haberdashery similes, more at home with a dish or dress than with

the moon, and able to set dumb things into gesture, thus:

> Troth, you speak wondrous well for your old house here;
> 'Twill shortly fall down at your feet to thank you,
> Or stoop, when you go to bed, like a good child,
> To ask your blessing.

Verse, to Middleton, is a native idiom; he speaks in it naturally, bending it as he pleases, to any shade of meaning, filling it with stuff alien to poetry and yet keeping its good metre. He does not write for the sake of the verse, and only a native honesty of ear keeps him from dropping clean out of it, without knowing, into prose. Thus, he has few fine passages; yet a few of them he has, where imagination has fastened upon him, and dictated his words. His lines run often, in his later work, to fourteen syllables, yet their feet slide easily within the measure. As he lets his lines grow longer, so he allows himself longer speeches, because he knows that he can keep the ear awake and following them. And, by the time of *The Changeling* the versification has become graver, with a new thrill in it, through which passion, and not only the mind's energies, can now speak. Was it Rowley who

first showed Middleton the possibility of that passionate note, by which drama becomes not only drama but poetry?

If, as I have conjectured, *The Old Law* leads the way from the farcical comedies to the tragic comedies like *A Fair Quarrel*, it is in that play that the influence of Rowley may be first distinguished; and it is impossible not to connect it with the change which came about in the work of Middleton, a change from work almost wholly comic, and of the city kind, to a work partly tragic and partly comic in a higher and more romantic sense. We find Rowley's name beside Middleton's on the title-pages of *The Old Law*, *A Fair Quarrel*, *The World tost at Tennis*, *The Spanish Gipsy*, and *The Changeling*; most, that is, of the finest of Middleton's later work, with only the two exceptions of *Women beware Women* and *A Game at Chess*. The manner and measure of this collaboration is not so easy to discover as it may at first sight appear. It is his faults that are most obvious in Rowley, his dissonant verse, his over-strained speech, his incapacity for construction, something jagged and uneven in his whole work; and it is only gradually

that people are beginning to realise that these defects are not the essential part of him. His plays have had the not unnatural misfortune to be chaotically printed, verse and prose never clearly distinguished from one another; and some of them are only to be found in a few rare copies of the original editions. It is difficult to be certain of his exact share in many plays to which his name is, rightly or wrongly, appended. One thing is certain; that the plays written by Rowley and Middleton together are finer than any of the plays written by either separately. And it is almost equally certain that Rowley's share in the work was not confined to those scenes or passages in which his actual hand can be distinguished in the versification, but that there was a further and closer collaboration of a kind which no tests of style or versification can ever disentangle. We have seen Middleton working alone, and, to a slight extent, with Dekker; we shall see him, at the end of his career, again working alone. We have now to consider what can be found out about Rowley, in such work as he did by himself or in company with others, before we can hope to arrive at

any conclusion in regard to the work in which he is the companion of Middleton.

The plays published under Rowley's name or initials are: *A New Wonder, a Woman never Vexed*, 1632; *All's Lost by Lust*, 1633; *A Match at Midnight*, 1633; and *A Shoemaker a Gentleman*, 1638. Of these *A Match at Midnight* has little resemblance with any of his known work, while it has a close resemblance with the early work of Middleton. It goes with something of the rapidity of the wild and whirling comedies of about the time of *Your Five Gallants*, but would add more credit to an imitator than to Middleton. Here, as elsewhere, Rowley may in his capacity of actor have made slight changes for acting purposes, which would account for the use of his initials. There is no reason to suppose that he had even so much to do with *Fortune by Land and Sea*, published, in 1655, as by Heywood and Rowley, or with *The Thracian Wonder*, attributed to Webster and Rowley by Kirkman in 1661. There is little more probability in the same editor's attribution to the same writers of *A Cure for a Cuckold*, which he published in the same year. Kirkman's word

is valueless as evidence, and there is nothing in the play of which we can say with much probability that it is by either Webster or Rowley. Only the slow and thoughtful quality of some of the verse gives any real suggestion of Webster; and verse of Webster's kind is quite possible to imitate. The drearily comic prose is done after the pattern of the time, and there is nothing in it distinguishable from similar hack-work, whether done by Rowley or by others for the day's wage.

In *The Travels of the Three English Brothers*, published in 1607, with a dedication signed "John Day, William Rowley, George Wilkins," it is easy, but not very profitable, to trace the share of Rowley. He probably put in Zaripha, the Shylock of the play, and wrote some of the more pompous blank verse and of the coarser verbal fooling. In *The Maid in the Mill*, licensed to Fletcher and Rowley 29 August, 1623, and played at the Globe with Rowley as one of the actors, his share and Fletcher's are quite distinct, and they are divided no doubt, equally. Rowley's verse, by the side of the winged verse of Fletcher, seems somewhat crabbed and abstract, and the

prose (interspersed with Fletcher's songs) somewhat cold and laboured. In *The Witch of Edmonton*, published in 1658 as "a Tragi-Comedy by divers well-esteemed poets, William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, John Ford, etc.," where Dekker and Ford are both equally evident, in their direction of the two main currents, the share of Rowley is difficult to make out, and could hardly have been considerable. There remains *The Birth of Merlin* which was published in 1662 as by Shakespeare and Rowley. Langbaine tells us that "William Rowley was not only beloved by those great men, Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Jonson, but likewise writ, with the former, *The Birth of Merlin*." The share of Shakespeare is not now in need of discussion; the play is crude and lumpish; it is stilted and monotonous in the verse, gross and tame in the prose. It would be pleasant to think that Rowley had no more to do with it than Shakespeare; but it is difficult to be positive in the matter after reading *A Shoemaker a Gentleman.*

This incongruous and incoherent piece is a tragic farce, which has never been reprinted from the execrable first edition of 1638, where

the printer, in his address to "the honest and high-spirited gentlemen of the never decaying art, called the gentle craft," admits with some honesty: "I know it may come short of that accurateness both in plot and style that this witty age doth with greater curiosity require," yet excuses it, on the ground "that as plays were then, some twenty years ago, it was in the fashion." It is a sad jumble of cobblers, kings, "a wise virgin in Wales," and a Juliet's nurse; at one moment "an angel ascends out of the well and after descends again," at another there is drinking of blood, and we hear in detail of tortures endured in war; the language varies from "Moulting tyrant, stop thy scandalous breath," used by quarreling kings, to "Clapperdudgeon" and "Knipperdolin," flung as pet names by the cobbler at his wife. The few good lines which we come across at rare intervals are almost cruelly wasted; the farce which submerges them is a mere desperate attempt at comic realism.

On the title-page of *A New Wonder*, Rowley is described as "one of his Majesty's Servants"; he is mentioned among the principal actors in *The Maid in the Mill*; in *The Inner-Temple*

Mœsque he played Plumporridge; and, in the list of persons in *All's Lost by Lust*, we are told that Jaques, "a simple clownish gentleman," was "personated by the poet." In the plays which he wrote in collaboration with Middleton, his hand has been most generally traced in the comic underplots, and sometimes as a disturbing element there, working for hardly more than the ears of the groundlings. In the low peasant's humour, earthy and almost animal, which he takes much trouble over in all these plays, sometimes making it really droll, always making it emphatic and telling, there seems to have been something which he really cared to do, perhaps because it was what he could represent best on the stage. In the two chief plays which he wrote by himself he wove the comic prose not ineffectively into the more serious substance, but not only in *A Shoemaker a Gentleman*, but in most of the work done with Middleton, it stands out in sharp contrast. And this is the more curious, as we shall find unmistakable signs of a very different kind of influence exercised by him upon precisely that serious substance.

For it is not as a comic poet that Rowley is most himself, or most admirable. Of his two remaining plays, one is a heroic tragedy and the other a pathetic domestic comedy, and we find in both, very differently exhibited, the same qualities of sincerity and nobility, often turning to uncouthness or exaggeration, but never, as in Middleton, losing the moral sense, the honesty of insight. The action in each is strained beyond probability, and in one becomes barbarous, in the other artificial; the verse follows the action, and halts, not only through the treasons of a more than usually treacherous printer. Yet, as the verse is but an emphasis upon profoundly felt speech, so the action rests always on a strong human foundation.

In *All's Lost by Lust* (which deals with a subject made more famous by Landor in *Count Julian*) Rowley shows himself a poet by his comprehension of great passions, his sympathy with high moods, and by a sheer and naked speech, which can grasp filth or heroism in an equal grip. He has no measure, though sometimes constraint; no subtlety, though he will set consciences or clowns

arguing in terms of strange pedantry; no sentiment, though he has all the violences of direct emotion; and he says what he wants to say and then stops. He has no ease or grace, and often labours to give point to his humour and weight to his serious utterances. The kind of verse that characterises him at his best is:

> Thy soul is a hired lackey towards hell,

and he can sharpen it thus:

> Time's ancient bawd, opportunity,
> Attends us now, and yet our flaming blood
> Will scarce give leave to opportunity.

Often he will go beyond the bounds of natural speech, not on a carrying imagination, but under the dragging weight of an emphasis which eloquence can do better without. In some of Blake's drawings of naked men with prodigious muscles, sweeping beards, and frantic eyes, the intense imitation of emotion has gone further than nature can lend help to. Just so does some of the tragic speech in Rowley falter through defects of mere force. "Rough Rowley, handling song with Esau's hand," as Swinburne has called him in a significant

line, sets himself to construct imagery, and does it, sometimes with splendour, but a splendour prolonged to extinction. Thus he will develop a figure after this manner:

> We'll make so high to quench their silver moons
> And on their carcases an isthmus make
> To pass their straits again and forage them.

Both in fun and earnest he plays on words, and is capable of writing "My heart's triangled," as Donne might have done, and distinguishing the number and position of the points. More often he does it in this wholly Elizabethan manner:

> My honoured friends,
> What we all thought to have borne home in triumph
> Must now be seen there in a funeral,
> Wrecked honour being chief mourner; here's the hearse
> Which we'll all follow.

Even his "virgin martyrs," like Jacinta, who act nobly, are sometimes set talking with horrible detail, as, like Jacinta, they spit at their tormentors and wish

> that my tongue
> Were pointed with a fiery Pyramis
> To strike thee through.

It is impossible for him to realise, even in his Dionysia, who dies with some of the ecstasy

of Shakespeare's Cleopatra, that a woman can be lascivious and yet talk like a lady. His men can say memorable things, in which there is some of the passion of meditation, but, however well he knew "what kind of thing a man's heart" is, he did not know how to give continually adequate speech to those passions whose habitation there he was aware of.

In *A New Wonder*, which takes place in London, and shows us the strange vehement passions, both petty and ardent, of business men, their small prides and large resolutions, we have a speech more easily on the level of the occasion, whether in this heightened way:

> Then be not angry, gentle sir,
> If now a string be touched, which hath too long
> Sounded so harshly over all the city;
> I now would wind it to a musical height;

or whether the unrelenting father in prison repels his son with the direct cry:

> Ha! what art thou? Call for the keeper there,
> And thrust him out of doors or lock me up.

Here, as elsewhere, the language is sometimes injured by emphasis, yet there is none of Middleton's aim at point and cleverness, but a

speech vividly and sometimes grossly natural, which sticks close to the matter. Its comedy is a kind of literalness, and its pathos is, too; and both are crammed with fine substance, thoughtful humour and thoughtful pity, with that simple acceptance and rendering of things as they are which Lamb noted in the play with much satisfaction. It is of this play that he says: "The old play-writers are distinguished by an honest boldness of exhibition, they show everything without being ashamed." Here, there is coarseness and there is clumsiness, but there is no flaw in the essential rightness and reality of this whole contest in hearts, in which a natural human charity has its way with invincible softness.

Now, if we begin to look for the influence of Rowley upon Middleton, we shall find it not so much in the set scenes of low comedy which he inserted among Middleton's verse, but in a new capacity for the rendering of great passions and a loftiness in good and evil which had never yet been found as an element in Middleton's brilliant and showy genius, and which hardly survives the end of his collaboration with Rowley. The whole range of sub-

ject suddenly lifts, a new, more real and more romantic world (more real and more romantic because imagination rather than memory is at work) is seen upon the stage, and by some transformation, which could hardly have been mere natural growth, Middleton finds himself to be a poet.

That Middleton learnt from Rowley, or did, with his help, more than either of them could do by himself, is evident for the first time clearly in *A Fair Quarrel*. The best part of the actual writing is not Rowley's. Middleton was a man of flexible mind, and we find in him everywhere a marvellous tact of matching his matter and manner. Never, in his wild comedies, does he bring in false heroics; he can keep on a due actual level beyond any dramatist of his time; and, when a great human moment comes to him, and has to be dealt with, he rises easily, and is no less adequate. He does not rise of himself, his material compels him, he is obedient to it, and, I cannot but think, awake to a fierier impulse like Rowley's. It is certain that Rowley could not have written the two great Captain Ager scenes as they stand; but I am

equally certain that, with all his promptness of response to an emotion, Middleton could not have begun to render, at such a moral height, such an "absolute man," without some spiritual aid or life from Rowley. When there, when started, he drew his poetry, as he was wont to do, directly from his subject, and the natural emotion of it; and made a great scene where a weak one would have been contemptible. Can nature and poetry go further together, poetry hardly distinguishable from the direct speech of nature, so warmed is it by human breath? Captain Ager's last words to his mother shine like fire and cut like steel, and are mere plain words with no more rhetoric in them than in this line which strikes straight:

> I never shall have need of honour more.

In the scene of the duel, when all this fire is out in the man's soul, the tamer verses are not less absolute in their disheartened speech:

> What shall be done in such a worthless business
> But to be sorry, and to be forgiven;
> You, sir, to bring repentance, and I pardon?

That the writing, in the two great scenes of Captain Ager, is Middleton's, and owes noth-

ing in form, whatever it may owe in substance, to Rowley, can be proved beyond doubt by a mere reading over together of two speeches, one in this play, one in a play so wholly and characteristically Middleton's as *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*: the speech of Captain Ager (ii. 1), which begins:

> Mine? think me not so miserable,

and ends:

> Without which I'm ten fathoms under coward,
> That now am ten degrees above a man,
> Which is but one of virtue's easiest wonders;

and the speech of Sir Walter (v. 1) which begins:

> O death! is this
> A place for you to weep?

and ends:

> this shows like
> The fruitless sorrow of a careless mother,
> That brings her son with dalliance to the gallows,
> And then stands by and weeps to see him suffer.

The difference is all in the feeling; there is none in the phrasing.

But that difference in the feeling! There is no indication, in anything which Middleton

has so far written by himself, that he was capable of conceiving a character like Captain Ager, or of keeping such a character on a single level of high emotion. This Rowley could do, and I have no doubt that he was the "only begetter" of what he left to Middleton to develop. It is Rowley who writes the dedication, and it is evident that he takes much of the credit of the play to himself. "You see, sir," he says, "I write as I speak, and I speak as I am, and that's excuse enough for me." His share in the actual writing is, indeed, almost too evident; there is cold, pedantic, sour and crabbed prose, aping comedy, and, in the scene between Jane and the physician, a hard, reasoning kind of serious verse which jars singularly on the rich and copious verse of Middleton, in the finer parts of the play. Some of the worst of the mechanical fooling in prose was added in a second edition, and (the public being much the same in all ages) it was probably added because the original sample had given much satisfaction to the public. Rowley worked for hire, and this is some of his hired work.

It was not long after the time of *A Fair*

Quarrel that Middleton and Rowley collaborated together in the admirable and entertaining masque, *The World tost at Tennis*. For the most part, Middleton's masques are tame and tedious, without originality in the invention or lyrical quality in the songs. In one only, *The Inner Temple Masque*, is there any natural gaiety, any real quaintness or humour; and, as we find Rowley's name among the actors, in the humorous peasant part of Plumporridge, may it not be conjectured that Rowley had some share in the writing? His heavy tread is as distinctly heard through all the opening part of *The World tost at Tennis*, as Middleton's new voice is heard in the later part. Middleton rarely wrote a lovelier succession of cadences than in these lines spoken by Deceit to Simplicity:

> The world, sweetheart, is full of cares and troubles,
> No match for thee; thou art a tender thing,
> A harmless, quiet thing, a gentle fool,
> Fit for the fellowship of ewes and rams;
> Go, take thine ease and pipe; give me the burden,
> The clog, the torment, the heart-break, the world:
> Here's for thee, lamb, a dainty oaten pipe.

And there is suavity, swiftness and a quaint fantastic colouring in the verse chattered

against hypocrites and puritans by the Five Starches.

It was probably about the time, when he was engaged on his masques, that Middleton wrote *The Witch*, and this may well have been his first attempt at a purely romantic play. The versification is done with astonishing ease, in long, loose, rapid lines; and, in the witches' songs, there is not only a ghastly fancy awake, but something nearer to a fine lyric cadence than he ever got before or since. It is through the interpolation, as it obviously was, of some of these lines in the very imperfect text of *Macbeth*, that a play in which the main action is almost a parody of the romantic drama has come to be looked upon as one of Middleton's chief works. The mere writing throughout is good, but the easy eloquent dialogue covers no more than the gaps and deformations of the main outline. The witches bring a new element into Middleton's work, a wild fancy, of which he had shown hardly a trace; in the rest of the play he does but practise in the romantic manner. They stand in some dim middle air, between the old vile pitiable crone of Dekker in *The Witch of Edmonton*,

who is dreadfully human, and the "crowded empress of the nether clefts of hell" in *Macbeth*, who shares no resemblance with the other Hecate but in her name, and who is more dreadful because she is not human. But Lamb has said finally all that need be said on these fundamental differences.

After the experiment of *The Witch*, Middleton seems to have returned to his collaboration with Rowley, and it is to about this time that we must assign the play by which both are now chiefly remembered, the tragedy of *The Changeling*. It is Rowley who begins the play, and thus introduces and characterises both Bianca and De Flores. The germ of both is there, and the rest of the play is but its growth. But, even in this opening, there are distinct though slight traces of Middleton, as if the collaboration had begun already. Middleton takes up the thread in the second act, and has both hands upon it in the third, though at the end of the great scene Rowley seems to snatch the whole web out of his hands and to twist it into an abrupt end. In all this part, mainly written by Middleton, there is a restraint never paralleled elsewhere in his

work; nowhere else are words used with such fruitful frugality, or so much said in so little. And this bareness, this fierce reticence, lead up, with a stealthy directness, to that outbreak of evil joy when De Flores cries:

> O this act
> Has put me into spirit!

and the modest murderess answers in astonishment:

> Why, 'tis impossible thou canst be so wicked
> Or shelter such a cunning cruelty
> To make his death the murderer of my honour!

The whole scene is written in words of white heat; Middleton has distilled into it the essence of his own genius and of the genius of Rowley; it is, in Leigh Hunt's famous and revealing words of De Flores, " at once tragical, probable, and poetical" beyond almost any single scene in the Elizabethan drama; a scene unlike anything in Shakespeare, but comparable, not as poetry but as drama with Shakespeare. And it is on the level of this great scene that the play ends, in a splendid horror, and it is Rowley who ends as he began the dreadful lives of De Flores and of Beatrice. Rowley's underplot and some of Middleton's inter-

mediate action do what they can to deform a play which, but for them, would be a noble and complete masterpiece. Yet the single impression left upon our minds is scarcely affected by them. The play is De Flores, and De Flores seems to greaten as he passes from one to the other of the two playwrights, as they collaborate visibly at his creation. In this great creation is the first result and justification of Middleton and Rowley's work in common; for it is certain that De Flores as he is would never have been possible to either Rowley or Middleton.

The Spanish Gipsy is generally put down almost as a whole to Middleton, and even Swinburne refuses to see the hand of Rowley in "the more high-toned passages." I am inclined to think that Rowley wrote a larger part of the play than Middleton, and not by any means only the gipsy scenes, with their jollity, dancing and crabbed ballad singing. The opening was, no doubt, actually written by Middleton, but it has a quality unusual in his work, and not unusual in the work of Rowley. It is as if Rowley were behind Middleton, controlling him. Most of the

prose, both when it goes creeping and tedious with Sancho and Soto, and when it overflows into doggrel and occasionally savoury snatches of song, has Rowley's manner and substance; but he is to be traced, also, in the slow and powerful verse which ends the third act, in lines like:

> This is the triumph of a soul drowned deep
> In the unfathomed seas of matchless sorrow,

and in the whole attitude and speech of a father who speaks with the very accent of Julianus in *All's Lost by Lust*:

> Teach me how I may now be just and cruel,
> For henceforth I am childless.

Rowley is heard, also, through much of the fourth act, though Middleton comes in unmistakably towards the end, and is the writer of the whole fifth act. The characters are distributed between them, and so charming a person as Constanza is decidedly at her best when she speaks through Middleton. The whole play is not made very probable, or meant to be so; it is a frank romance, with stage mysteries, some of them thrilling, like the wonderful opening scene, some, mere tricks

of convenience; and there is a freshness and pleasantness about it which seem to show us Middleton in full and final acceptance of the romantic manner.

Yet it is difficult to assign to any other period the comedy of *Anything for a Quiet Life*, printed in 1662, and so badly printed that it is not easy to distinguish the prose from the verse, the more so as the one seems to be set to run in no very different measures from the other. It seems to be a late and only return to the earlier manner of the farcical comedies of city life, with shop-keeping scenes of the old random brilliance and the old domestic fooleries and reinstallments. Even more matter is crammed into it, even more hastily, and there is the old fierce vigour of talk. But in two plays, published together in 1657, we see what seems to be almost the last mood of Middleton, after his collaboration with Rowley was at an end, and the influence perhaps not wholly evaporated. *More Dissemblers besides Women*, which is characteristic of Middleton in its tangle of virtues and hypocrisies, its masquerade of serious meanings and humourous disguises, is written in verse of a lovely

and eager quality, which bends with equal flexibility to the doings of "those dear gipsies" and to the good cardinal's concerns of conscience "in a creature that's so doubtful as a woman." It is a parti-coloured thing, and has beauty and oddity. But in *Women beware Women* we find much of Middleton's finest and ripest work, together with his most rancid "comic relief"; a stern and pitiless "criticism of life" is interrupted by foul and foolish clowning; and a tragedy of the finest comic savour ends in a mere heap of corpses, where

> vengeance met vengeance
> Like a set match, as if the plagues of sin
> Had been agreed to meet here all together.

"I've lost myself in this quite" Middleton might say with the duke, and rarely has better material been more callously left to spoil. There is no finer comedy of its kind in the whole of Elizabethan drama than the scene between Livia, Bianca and the widow; and the kind is a rare, bitter and partly tragic one. The human casuistry is flawless; the irony is an illumination rather than a correction of reality. And these vile people are alive, and the vices in them work with a bewildering and convincing

certainty. The technique of such scenes as that in which husband and wife flaunt their new finery at each other is not less than astonishing. All the meaner passions are seen in probable action, speaking without emphasis, in a language never too far from daily speech for the complete illusion of reality. There is not even the interruption of a mere splendour, no one speaks greatly or utters irrelevant poetry; here, poetry is the very slave and confidant of drama, heroically obedient. But the heights of *The Changeling*, the nobility of even what was evil in the passions of that play, are no longer attained. Middleton, left to himself, has returned, with new experience and new capacity, to his own level.

With one more experiment, and this a master-piece of a wholly new kind, "the only work of English poetry," says Swinburne, "which may properly be called Aristophanic," the career of Middleton comes, as far as we know, to an end. *A Game of Chess* is a satire, taking the popular side against Spain, and it was the Spanish ambassador Gondomar, the "Machiavel-politician" and Black Knight of its chess-board, who caused the suppression

of the play, and the punishment of all concerned in it. It is the most perfect of Middleton's works, and it carries some of his most intimate qualities to a point they had not reached before. Banter turns to a quite serious and clear and bitter satire; burlesque becomes a severe and elegant thing; the verse, beginning formally and always kept well within bounds, is fitted with supreme technical skill to this new, outlandish matter; there are straight confessions of sins and symbolic feasts of the vices, in which a manner learnt for the numbering of the feasts and fastings of the city finds itself ready for finer use. We learn now how

> fat cathedral bodies
> Have very often but lean little soul,

and the imagery, already expressive, takes on a new colour of solemn mockery.

> From this Leviathan-scandal that lies rolling
> Upon the crystal waters of devotion,

is sometimes the language of the Black Knight, and sometimes:

> In the most fortunate angle of the world
> The court hath held the city by the horns
> Whilst I have milked her.

Technique, in drama and verse alike, never flags; and the play is a satire and criticism, no longer of city manners or of personal vices, but of the nations' policy; and that it was accepted as such, by the public and by the government of the time, is proved by the fifteen hundred pounds taken by the actors in nine days, and by the arrest of Middleton for what was really a form of patriotism.

We have no record of anything written by Middleton during the three remaining years of his life. *A Game of Chess* is the culmination of those qualities which seem to have been most natural and instinctive in him, in spite of the splendid work of another kind which he did with Rowley in *The Changeling*. His genius was varied and copious, and he showed his capacity to do almost every kind of dramatic work with immense vigour. Life is never long absent from these tangled scenes, in which so heterogeneous a crowd hurries by, not stopping long enough to make us familiar with most of the persons in it, but giving us an unmistakable human savour. Few of the plays are quite satisfactory all through; there is almost always some con-

siderable flaw, in construction, in characterisation, or in aesthetic taste; yet hardly one of them can be neglected in our consideration of the work as a whole. In single scenes of tragedy and of comedy (romantic comedy, the comedy of manners, farce and satire) he can hold his own against any contemporary and it is only in lyric verse that he is never successful. He became a remarkable dramatic poet, but he was not born to sing. Poetry came to him slowly, and he had to disentangle it from more active growths of comic energy. It came to him when he began to realise that there was something in the world besides cheating shop-keepers and cozening lawyers, and the bargains made between men and women for bodies, not souls. With the heightening of emotions his style heightens, and as his comedy refines itself his verse becomes subtler. The cry of De Flores:

> Ha! what art thou that tak'st away the light
> Betwixt that star and me? I dread thee not:
> 'Twas but a mist of conscience;

is almost unique in imagination in his work. And it is drama even more than it is poetry. His style is the most plausible of all styles

in poetry, and it has a probable beauty, giving an easy grace of form to whatever asks to be expressed. It rarely steps aside to pick up a jewel, nor do jewels drop naturally out of its mouth.

1907.

THE END

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